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**A HISTORY AND INTERPRETIVE  
ANALYSIS OF PLAY FOR TODAY  
(BBC1, 1970-84)**

T W MAY

Ph.D.

2023

**A HISTORY AND INTERPRETIVE  
ANALYSIS OF PLAY FOR TODAY  
(BBC1, 1970-84)**

THOMAS WILLIAM MAY

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of the University of Northumbria  
at Newcastle for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy

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Design and Social Sciences

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## Abstract

My thesis is a history and interpretive analysis of Play for Today (BBC1, 1970-84) (PFT). It is important, as this prestigious strand of one-off dramas has yet to receive any in-depth longitudinal studies.

I have used a mix of qualitative and quantitative analysis: informed by my having watched or read Camera Scripts for over four-fifths of PFT. I have used archival sources from the BBC Written Archives Centre and digital archives, alongside selected oral history testimony regarding PFT from its practitioners.

PFT has been valued as emblematic of a TV 'Golden Age', and an equally lost era of cultural democratisation in Britain. It made artful uses of video and film aesthetics, harnessing both to create vivid, human-centric one-off dramas that were generally highly valued by critics and audiences for their toughness and variety. PFT represented London and Northern Ireland frequently, and also Scotland and Northern England more from 1974. However, PFT generally neglected Wales and the North East of England. Its representations of non-metropolitan Britain were variously downbeat and upbeat, reflecting deep unease at, or approval of, aspects of contemporaneous social change. PFT represented working-class men especially richly in the mid-1970s, when it was also often male-centric, but it included significantly more women writers from 1977-82. In its later years, PFT built on its earlier deep insights into masculine workspaces to include varied feminist dramas, which critiqued male violence. While it had relatively few Black or Asian creators, its many gay dramatists and anarchistic Jewish playwrights contributed to its humanist range. PFTs like *In the Beautiful Caribbean* and *Even Solomon* were more representationally advanced than BBC-TV's discussion programmes.

My findings reveal an original history and interpretive analysis of PFT, in its many varied contexts. They are of considerable interest to TV historians and also TV drama practitioners today.

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Alongside many others thanked elsewhere, the following people provided sterling help for my PFT title sequences survey: Sergio Angelini, John Barron, Marie Bennett, Paul Benton, Ben Brown, Chris Browning, James Martin Charlton, Callum Easton, Paul Ebbs, Warren Fick, Robert Hanks, Anna Heyman, Antonia Howard, Sue Lawrence, David Lichfield, Neil McDonald, Karen May, Matt Michael, Jonathan Norton, Andrew Orton, Cheryl Kerasoula Panagiotou, Kat Pearson, Kiran Rakkar, Alan Read, James Richardson, John E. Robinson, Theresa Stinson, Damien Timmer, Kath Tyldesley, Stephen Webster and Joyce Wilson.

I warmly thank all 83 interviewees and 29 correspondents who have shared their time and memories of working on PFT, at the BBC, or in newspaper criticism, with me; as well as their agents who have tirelessly facilitated this contact. All interviewees have shown unfailing courtesy, encouragement and assistance; Peter Anson, Jacmel Dent and Keith Howes have been exceptional guiding intellectual spirits for my research. I thank Juliette Jones warmly for her brilliant transcripts of the interviews and assured communication.

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I deeply thank James Leggott for his skilful, judicious supervision over the past four years. James has been unfailingly enthusiastic, while being immensely patient with the prolix detail of my initial draft work...! I thank my amazing wife, Dr Rachel Queen for her patience with my occasional insufferable myopia about this Ph.D. topic and for all of her love throughout an invigorating, challenging time. Rachel's help with the final submission was absolutely exceptional and I could not have completed it in as timely a manner without her. I thank our glorious cocker spaniel Jester deeply too, despite her occasional bouts of incessant barking!

I dedicate this Ph.D. to my parents, Pauline May and Steve May, for everything, which includes feedback on Chapter 2 and showing me *Pennies from Heaven*, *The Singing Detective* and *Nuts in May* back in the late-1990s and to Gerry May and Val May (1939-2022), in whose house in Scunthorpe I may well have first watched a PFT, *Abigail's Party*.

## Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. This is fully the case for all work submitted for Volume One; however, in Volume Two, Appendix 7 was written in collaboration with Alan Burton and Appendix 9 includes typed-up reviews from nine TV critics, which are the subject of analysis, in order to demonstrate my methodology. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others. Citations are all incorporated via the MHRA system, shown in footnotes at the bottom of each page.

Ethical clearance for the research presented, including via interviews that were conducted, has been approved. Approval was sought and granted through the Researcher's submission to Northumbria University's Ethics Online System on 12 September 2019.

BBC copyright content is reproduced courtesy of the British Broadcasting Corporation. I include a range of screen shot images from Plays for Today as fair usage for the purposes of scholarship under the fair dealing provisions of UK copyright law.

**I declare that the Word Count of this Thesis is 100,118, excluding footnotes, list of references and appendices.**

Name: Thomas William May

Date: Saturday 21 January 2023

## Introduction

I remember trying to watch these dreadfully earnest exercises in socialist-realist art during my childhood and thinking that watching live footage of people queueing for a bus would be more compelling. Play for Today was such a terrible exercise in viewer patronisation that it was directly responsible for making the snooker that was on at the same time on BBC2 a huge TV success.<sup>1</sup>

Thatcher and Tebbit [...] believed that the BBC was a den of lefties and even Marxists. Certain parts of the organisation possibly were – BBC1's Play for Today strand was explicitly a theatre of socialism [...]<sup>2</sup>

No script was too worthy, no subject too depressing [...] Now, not every Play for Today was a hand-wringing denunciation of the evils of capitalism, but to be honest quite a lot of them were...<sup>3</sup>

On 19 November 2013, I tuned into BBC2, where Dominic Sandbrook presented a documentary concerning British culture and the Cold War – often sporting an ushanka hat. Following a de-contextualised clip from Colin Welland's *Leeds United!* (1974), Sandbrook sweepingly claimed that Play for Today (PFT) was left-wing propaganda. At this stage, I had only seen around 15 Plays for Today, but even then I knew, from scanning lists of the 300 or so titles and their writers – Alan Garner, Václav Havel, Willy Russell, N.F. Simpson, William Trevor, many women writers I was then mostly unaware of – that there must be far more to PFT than *that*.<sup>4</sup> Sandbrook's casual, thumbnail sketch of the strand echoed previous reductive comments by Michael Gove and Mark Lawson and has since been advanced by several journalists including Victoria Coren Mitchell, who claims that PFT was 'so dour! So bleak, so brown, and literally every single play seemed to be about trade union meetings [...] there was no avoiding the faint whiff of misery porn for the middle classes.'<sup>5</sup> To counter these lazy, dishonest and partial journalistic accounts of PFT –

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<sup>1</sup> Gove, M. (2008) Why Play for Today is not the way to go, *Times*, 8 Apr, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Lawson, M. (2008) A life in broadcasting: The BBC, *Guardian*, 20 Dec [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2008/dec/20/bbc-life-in-broadcasting> [accessed: 30/08/2021]

<sup>3</sup> Sandbrook, quoted from *Strange Days: Cold War Britain, Episode 2: The Looking Glass War* (19 Nov 2013). This was broadcast at 9pm, very close to PFT's most typical time slot, but on the more select BBC2.

<sup>4</sup> Another long-term influence on me was David Rolinson's closing contribution to a Roundtable on 21 July 2011 at Northumbria University's *Alien Nation: A Conference of British Science Fiction, Horror and Fantasy Television*; Rolinson argued that telefantasy has been exceptionally well-documented by academics and fans and that one-off TV dramas deserved more time and attention.

<sup>5</sup> Coren Mitchell, V. (2020) How I See It; In the 1970s, politics took the pleasure out of playtime, *Daily Telegraph*, 17 Oct, 11. See also: Graham, A. (2020). Why the BBC must never bring back Play for Today; They made for extraordinary TV, but 90-minute plays would never work now, *Radio Times*, 6 Oct, 19; Rowat, A. (2020). Taskmaster, The Trump Show, Portrait Artist of the Year, Drama Out of a Crisis, reviews, *Herald Scotland*, 17 Oct [online] Available at: <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/18786490.taskmaster-trump-show-portrait-artist-year-drama-crisis-reviews/> [accessed: 12/05/2022].

and address the absence of detailed academic studies – I felt that the subject deserved more thorough historical analysis.

This is a Ph.D. which provides a history and an interpretive analysis of the phenomenon of Play for Today (BBC1, 1970-84), an anthology series of one-off dramas and a long-time fixture in the BBC's primary television channel's evening schedules, shown after the *BBC Nine O'Clock News*. There is much debate on what exactly constitutes a PFT, but typically, it would be broadcast at 9:25pm and be an original television play with a contemporary setting, sometimes generating controversy (see Appendix 5 for a detailed statistical history of the strand).

Contrary to myths – which are somewhat truer of PFT's predecessor, the Wednesday Play (1964-70) – PFT *does* exist in the archives. 263 full PFTs are held in various archives, though the likes of *Michael Regan* (1971) and *Ackerman, Dougall and Harker* (1972) are incredibly difficult to watch, not yet being digitised.<sup>6</sup> Of the 31 PFTs which were junked and have not been rediscovered in full, one has an extensive audio recording, another has its film inserts, while Camera Scripts of practically all are held in the BBC Written Archives Centre in Caversham. Thus, it is highly possible, given time and perseverance, to piece together a full history of the strand through watching recordings or reading scripts. Furthermore, newspaper archives and the BBC WAC's holdings concerning audience research are a rich resource enabling insights into how PFT was regarded when it was a living project.

When I commenced this Ph.D. study, PFT sat within the field of British archival television history like a vast iceberg, hidden and undiscovered. Part of this project's aim was to watch enough of PFT to be able to make some authoritative assessments concerning what it *was*, and how it developed over time. I did this partially through the aid of fellow archival researchers and collectors, but primarily through requesting scores of neglected PFTs via Learning on Screen's Box of Broadcasts facility. I am glad to have started a process which others have since added to, which means most extant PFTs are now accessible to card-holders at subscribing educational institutions.

In 2020, PFT returned to a degree of public prominence through its fiftieth anniversary. This included BBC Four's *Drama Out of a Crisis* documentary (2020), a BBC Radio 4 documentary, the BFI's online exhibition canvas curated by Katie Crosson, an online

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<sup>6</sup> From this point on, all PFTs referred to will include their original year of broadcast in the first instance. Exact broadcast dates are only given for the major case-studies. See Appendix 1A for a full list of original transmission dates.

symposium of academics and practitioners hosted by Royal Holloway, BBC Four's extensive season of seven PFT repeats and the BFI's releasing of 20 PFTs on three BluRay sets. While there has still yet to be any full-length book about the whole strand published, a special issue of the *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, edited by John Hill, has recently been published. While these developments, and this Ph.D. study, have begun rectifying the strand's neglect, there is still much work to do to achieve a comprehensive understanding, which needs further research and collaborations.

The primary concern of this Ph.D. study is to rescue PFT, in all its complexity, from the condescension of popular historical memory. It is impossible to include examples from all 245 PFTs I have watched or read; *all* are at least of considerable *historical* interest. This thesis aims to reveal something of the complex richness of PFT through an expansive data-led approach informed partially by literary scholar Franco Moretti.<sup>7</sup> This study differs from Moretti's in that, unlike his literary corpuses, the dataset of PFT's Average Shot Lengths needed constructing entirely humanly: I manually pressed the Z-key every time a shot changed when played within VLC Player. Data is used sometimes to address specific research questions, but, as with Moretti, qualitative human interpretation sometimes dovetails with statistical findings.<sup>8</sup>

Intellectually, this Ph.D. builds on the foundational cultural studies thinker Raymond Williams's approach by analysing texts within their historical contexts, while not entirely neglecting Williams's residual Leavisite attachment to canon formation: it is important to judge which PFTs are of highest significance and should be remembered and which will engage future generations.<sup>9</sup> Thus, in part, I aim to fulfil PFT dramatist Stephen Poliakoff's call for a serious historical evaluation of the BBC's uncharted archive of television one-off plays from the 1960s to the 1980s.<sup>10</sup> This study shares Paul Gilroy's humanist wariness of identity politics, while recognising the need to analyse the powerful pulls exerted by class, ethnicity, gender, nationhood and sexuality. It is fully in the spirit of film historian Karina Longworth's call to talk about past representations and understand historical trajectories, rather than throw out the past or 'brush it under the rug'.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Moretti, F. (ed.) (2017) *Canon/Archive: Studies in Quantitative Formalism From the Stanford Literary Lab*. New York: n+1 Foundation.

<sup>8</sup> Similarly to Moretti et al's analysis of literary style at the scale of the sentence, I combine my dataset of ASLs with another dataset concerning the film or video aesthetic used, alongside my hermeneutic interpretation of PFT's human dramas, to draw original conclusions: *ibid.* 61-63.

<sup>9</sup> Williams, R. (1965) [1961] *The Long Revolution*. Harmondsworth: Pelican, 57-88.

<sup>10</sup> Poliakoff, S. (2005) *Friends & Crocodiles and Gideon's Daughter*. London: Methuen, xiii.

<sup>11</sup> Newland, C. (2022) You Must Listen to This, *Sight and Sound*, (32)7, Sep, 48-49.

This thesis includes evaluation of PFTs according to their artistry, originality and representational significance, While all PFTs are of great interest, some *are*, subjectively, better than others: *Penda's Fen* (1974) and *Through the Night* (1975) clearly outshine *Three's One* (1973) and *Doran's Box* (1976) on myriad levels, though the latter remains a wilful oddity that everyone should watch and muse over at least once! I also aim to retrieve forgotten treasures from PFT, including from its more neglected final phase: Elaine Feinstein's *Breath* (1975), Brian Glover's *Thicker than Water* (1980) and Marcella Evaristi's *Eve Set the Balls of Corruption Rolling* (1982), entertaining and socially significant emanations from BBC Birmingham and BBC Scotland, respectively.

Part of the concern is to address not just the simplistic conservative or neoliberal perspectives of Sandbrook, Lawson and Coren Mitchell, but also a prevalent attitude within institutions and academia that archival screen media may be innately conservative and should be primarily perceived according to current precepts. There is anecdotal evidence that, for a planned screening of archival PFTs, the BFI withdrew one title due to their worries that audiences today cannot be trusted to be shown representations containing outdated or disturbing language and attitudes. I contend, rather, that it is essential to reckon with our past, warts and all. This Ph.D. sets out to analyse PFTs within their historical context while also, unavoidably, attending critically to what they mean to us subjectively as viewers today. A related aim is to encourage people today to want to investigate Play for Today's rich archive and to watch it for historical insight and pleasure and provide some scholarly groundwork for understanding it.

Before outlining my research questions and methodology, certain contested epistemological issues and uses of terminology significant to the thesis need considering.

### **A 'Total' history approach to PFT and its competing truths**

This thesis cannot uncover *the* truth about PFT. Absolute knowledge is impossible in the humanities and a 'Total' history approach to screen studies is vastly impractical, as Barbara Klinger shows.<sup>12</sup> However, following Klinger's suggestion, via Tony Bennett, I attempt 'Total' history's quixotic tilt at the impossible in order to uncover certain *provisional* truths, through historical means.<sup>13</sup> My work is a diachronic history: describing, explaining and analysing processes of continuity and change over time. This history aims to make the past useful in the present: my pluralistic socialist analysis of PFT challenges

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<sup>12</sup> Klinger, B. (1997) Film history terminable and interminable: recovering the past in reception studies, *Screen*, (38)2, 107-128.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 127-128.

‘the kind of monolithic summaries that usually characterise public accounts of bygone eras’, including of PFT and the 1970s and 1980s more broadly.<sup>14</sup>

As Klinger argues, no single approach can entirely unravel the text-ideology relationship.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, I supplement my diachronic interpretations of PFT texts’ pleasures and ideological meanings with oral history testimony, to reveal televisual creative practices (see Appendix 4 concerning scheduling), while situating PFTs in their intertextual zones and social and historical contexts.<sup>16</sup> Adopting Klinger’s focus on the contingencies and ‘instabilities of the historical moment’, Chapter 3 explores the multiple subjective truths in contemporary responses, which show differing expectations of PFT and consensuses and contestations over its meanings.<sup>17</sup> The range of interviewees’ voices featured in this thesis aims to remedy the disproportionate focus in British culture on certain key PFT creators: revealing the broader collective work that created a strand which exuded democratic pluralism.<sup>18</sup>

### **Modernism, realism and naturalism**

Modernism, realism and naturalism are contested terms, deployed across the Arts, which require explanation as to their usage throughout this thesis. As this study reveals, TV critics and viewers sometimes used ‘realism’ in notably contradictory ways, though most often about productions which visually resembled real-life, or which were perceived as true-to-life depictions of people and places.

My uses of naturalism and realism build on John Caughie’s conception of ‘naturalistic realism’: drama based on experience and environment, which offers ‘*a performative space – a space for acting* [my emphasis] – rather than a narrative space – a space for action’.<sup>19</sup> My work is also informed by Glen Creeber’s complementary perception that realism is an effect constructed for TV via devices which convey surface naturalism, like hard lighting, grainy film stock, hand-held camera and diegetic sound.<sup>20</sup> I use modernism to describe screen texts which may be either formally experimental or have politically challenging

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 128.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 127.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 107-128. A ‘total’ history approach to intertextual zones is humanly impossible: to situate PFT sufficiently would require wide, deep viewing of *Armchair Theatre*, *Z Cars*, *Film on Four* and *EastEnders*, at the very least...

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 122.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 126. Other diachronic features – televisual repeats and multimedia releases – are considered in Appendix 5 and Chapter 1, which also interrogates canonised creators’ biographical legends.

<sup>19</sup> Caughie, J. (2000) *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism & British Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 75, 77.

<sup>20</sup> Creeber, G. (ed.) (2006) *Tele-Visions: An Introduction to Studying Television*. London: British Film Institute, 42-43.

content, or both; closely-related terms are non-naturalism and modern experimental drama.<sup>21</sup>

This thesis attends to the complexity and paradoxes inherent in these terms. Billy Smart notes how the exemplary theatre naturalist Henrik Ibsen's plays actually incorporated much modernism; John Cook explains that Dennis Potter's and David Mercer's TV dramas used expressionist formal techniques to convey characters' internal psychological reality.<sup>22</sup> In this Ph.D., modernism, realism and naturalism are referred to as modes which are often interrelated within a continuum, rather than as entirely distinct genres or modes that consistently clash.

## **Research Questions and Structure**

This Ph.D. aims to address six main research questions, which map onto the main chapters, alongside two which are of overarching concern throughout:

- 1. Which writers, directors and actors did Play for Today give voice to?
- 2. Was Play for Today 'depressing', propagandist social realism preoccupied with public politics or was it humanist drama which explored the intersection of the public and private in a changing Britain?
- 3. Is there a substantial aesthetic or stylistic difference between Play for Today's uses of film and video? (Chapter 2)
- 4. Was there consensus or dissent amongst press TV critics and audiences in their responses to Play for Today over time? (Chapter 3)
- 5. How representative was Play for Today of the UK's nations and regions? (Chapter 4)
- 6. How fair and original were Play for Today's screen representations of ethnicity, sexuality, gender and class? (Chapter 5)

This study aims to examine the phenomenon of PfT from four different angles and explains its significance both within its historical context and explores how PfT speaks to us today.

This Ph.D. is structured into five chapters: a literature review, aesthetics and style, reception, nations and regions and representation, followed by a conclusion. I adopt this structure to assist clarity and cohesion. The selection of the chapter themes aims to

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<sup>21</sup> Cook, J.R. (1994) *Follow the Yellow Brick Road: A Study of the Work of Dennis Potter*. University of Glasgow, Jul [unpublished Ph.D. thesis]; Williams, R. (1972) [1954] *Drama in Performance*. Pelican Books, 133-156.

<sup>22</sup> Smart, B. (2010) *Old Wine in New Bottles – Adaptation of Classic Theatrical Plays on BBC Television 1957-1985*. Royal Holloway College [unpublished Ph.D. thesis], 196-203, 238-244; Cook *ibid.* 58-60.

demonstrate a detailed and wide-ranging engagement with existing schools of thought and methodological approaches within screen studies.

Chapter 1 provides a literature review, providing the necessary background to PFT in terms of British history, culture and ideas, while situating it within film and television studies historiography and investigating its canonisation by academics and journalistic critics. Chapter 2 pays necessary attention to the materiality of the televisual texts of PFT which use video or film or a mixture of both – alongside directorial style in television drama, hitherto highly neglected compared with film directors. This nevertheless remains attuned to the significance of collaborative institutional practices to avoid becoming an auteurist exercise which excessively exalts individuals. Chapter 3 pays detailed attention to contemporaneous responses to PFT based on primary archival sources from the BBC Written Archives Centre and newspaper archives; while utilising the discourse analysis methods of sociolinguistics independently developed by Norman Fairclough and David Howarth. Chapters 4 and 5 centre, respectively, on how PFT represented the nations and regions of the UK and significant identities of ethnicity, sexuality, gender and class. Each sub-section analysing how PFT represented a particular nation, region or identity is structured in the same format: firstly, a concise literature review of theoretical and historical ideas germane as background; secondly, a gazetteer with close interpretive textual analyses of a range of PFTs relevant to the place or identities represented and which identifies key representational tendencies. In foregrounding PFT's non-metropolitan representations, Chapter 4 complements rich analyses by Jonathan Murray of how the strand depicts liberalising Scottish mores and John Hill of its oblique and unique representations of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.<sup>23</sup> Lastly, Chapters 4 and 5 contain seven detailed case-studies, which may confirm or complicate trends discerned in the gazetteers. All case-studies are selected as being either typical or exceptional in differing ways. Six of the seven PFT case-studies selected exist in the archives, while the other is based on a close study of its Camera Script from the BBC WAC. These seven are selected because I feel they deserve more detailed attention: while one has been extensively covered in authorial studies of Trevor Griffiths's work, it is chosen here as analysis of Griffiths is essential to the thesis, as he is foremost among PFT's socialist humanist voices. Of the seven, only three have been repeated on British television and one of those in the

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<sup>23</sup> Murray, J. (2022) Scotch Missed: Play for Today and Scotland, *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, (19)2, 194-216; Hill, J. (2022) Play for Today and Northern Ireland in the 1970s, *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, (19)2, 217-240.

last 45 years; none have been released on DVD or BluRay. A conclusion will draw together the main findings from all chapters.

This thesis is supplemented by nine appendices, listed here:

- 1. List of Plays for Today (1970-84) and unofficial Plays for Today (1970-85) with aesthetic, archival availability, personnel, viewing figures and reaction indexes
- 2. Sample of a quarter of Play for Today (1970-84), showing Average Shot Lengths
- 3. List of people interviewed concerning Play for Today
- 4. **Tom May (2022)** Startling or Seductive? An Analysis of Play for Today's Title Sequences, *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, (19)2, 132-149.
- 5. **Tom May (2022)** Play for Today: A Statistical History, *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, (19)2, 261-276.
- 6. **Tom May (2023)** Representing the Black British presence on television in Barrie Keeffe's Play for Today (BBC1) dramas and beyond in: Susan L.T. Ashley and Degna Stone (eds.), *Whose Heritage? Challenging Race and Identity in Stuart Hall's Post-nation Britain*. London: Routledge, 122-136.
- 7. **Alan Burton & Tom May (2022)** – 'Treading on Sacred Turf': History, Femininity and the Secret War in the three Plays for Today, 'Licking Hitler' (1978), 'The Imitation Game' (1980) and 'Rainy Day Women' (1984), *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, (19)3, 325-359.
- 8. **Tom May (2022)** Poorly paid, but proud to work in teams producing 'quality': an oral history of women's experiences working in BBC Drama, *Critical Studies in Television*, (17)3, 297-310.
- 9. Examples of critics' reviews and my hermeneutic assessments of their positivity.

During my Ph.D. study, and following my speaking at the Royal Holloway symposium, the opportunity arose for me to write for the *JBCTv* special issue. Both of these articles are included here (as Appendices 4 and 5) and they outline a chronological history of the strand concerning how its evolving title sequences addressed viewers and provide core statistics which underpin this doctoral study and map PFT's varied terrain. Also included are accepted manuscripts of articles published in *Critical Studies in Television* and another for the *JBCTv*, alongside a book chapter for Susan Ashley and Degna Stone's edited collection, which both concern representation. Appendix 6 supplements Chapter 5's subsection on ethnicity, while Appendices 7 and 8 complement Chapter 5's study of gender. Appendix 8 emerges from my oral history interviews with people who worked on PFT or

covered it as journalists. This was an extensive diversification of this Ph.D.'s research project, adapting to the circumstances of the Covid pandemic.

## **Methodology**

This thesis aims to be an empirical but not empiricist study of PFT examining the strand's output in unique and material detail.<sup>24</sup> Using the parlance of linguistics, the aim is to avoid the binary of opinionated prescriptivism and neutral descriptivism. I aim to carefully describe and measure what PFT was and how it evolved over time, but also make *some* careful value judgements concerning this vast neglected archive and what we should value in it. However, rather than measuring single play against soap opera, this study fulfils Christine Geraghty's call to judge *within* this specific strand's output, while paying close attention to the material effect created by the BBC's use of video and film.<sup>25</sup>

This study draws on a range of divergent modes of analysis, which are used in tandem to address the complex and diverse output of PFT. Because no study of PFT can hope to be comprehensive, I am taking a mixed methodological approach in order to ascertain historical insights into the strand's development and shifting character. This project is in the tradition of the mixed approach taken by John Hill, Lez Cooke and Billy Smart in their AHRC-funded 'History of Forgotten Television Drama in the UK' project at Royal Holloway, University of London (2013-17), applied to the longitudinal study of PFT, the bulk of which is indeed forgotten. Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis will primarily utilise aesthetic and discourse analyses, applied to the material texts of PFT and their reception by press and public. Chapters 4 and 5 include interpretative and contextual analysis of a majority of PFTs, divided into sub-sets which reflect geographical and representational significance. All Chapters, including 4 and 5 which centre on qualitative textual analysis, incorporate original quantitative datasets which are analysed from a historical perspective. Data is used to illuminate the people and places that PFT presented on screen, alongside manually shot-logged Average Shot Lengths and the amount and positivity of post-broadcast coverage that PFTs received. Careful attention is paid to contextual broadcasting reasons which may have influenced trends to avoid making claims of the datasets which are overly positivist or which elide the role of the BBC and the wider broadcasting ecology. All chapters, to varying degrees, draw on the vital humanistic resource of the

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<sup>24</sup> This historical approach is partially inspired by E.P. Thompson's history-from-below ethos and his caution with theory: Thompson, E.P. (1995) [1978] *The Poverty of Theory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London: Merlin Press.

<sup>25</sup> Geraghty, C. (2003) Aesthetics and quality in popular television drama, *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, (6)1, 25-45.

voices of writers, directors, producers, actors and below-the-line workers who worked on Pft.

# Chapter 1

## Literature Review

### **1.1. Introduction**

This chapter surveys major trends in how PFT has been written about. This literature review primarily aims to address the following research questions:

- 1. What are the significant paradigms recurrent in literature concerning PFT?
- 2. Which creative personnel did PFT give voice to?
- 3. Which people and ideas were most significant to the historical, cultural and broadcasting contexts in which PFT existed?
- 4. Does literature suggest that PFT has been perceived more as left-wing propaganda or as humanist drama?

My analysis begins to address these questions with an overview of PFT's roots in the garlanded tradition of the television (TV) single-play. This is followed by short contextual overviews of British history, culture and the BBC: these accounts situate PFT in relation to significant places, voices and ideas that illuminate experiences of 1970-1984 and arguments concerning those times. Then, there is a historiographical account of PFT's position within the fields of film and television studies, including an account of writings about its major creative personnel. This is followed by a discussion of PFT's position in televisual canons constructed by journalists, critics and academics, in relation to other programmes and which specific PFTs have been canonised. This is followed by a brief section on recent debates over PFT, gender and authorship, which functions as an introductory prelude to Chapter 5, and then a conclusion draws together this literature review's findings.

### **1.2. Play for Today: a 'wistful beacon'<sup>1</sup> of quality, diversity and artistic freedom**

As previously mentioned, Mark Lawson and Dominic Sandbrook have associated PFT with left-wing propaganda, claims pre-echoed by Ian Kennedy Martin, who criticised what he

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<sup>1</sup> Cook, J.R. (2004) The Wednesday Play, in: H. Newcomb (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Television*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2512. This is Cook's phrase for how many current TV creators perceive the single-play tradition.

saw as its facile leftist politics, and Troy Kennedy Martin, who claimed it consisted of ‘declamatory [...] speeches’.<sup>2</sup> Left-wing comedian Alexei Sayle echoes this more approvingly, arguing that The Wednesday Play (TWP) and PFT constituted an effort, albeit unsuccessful, to introduce radical ideas and ‘cure the working-class of its mindless jingoism’.<sup>3</sup> TV academics have emphasised its radicalism. David Rolinson analyses PFT’s role as the best-known single-play strand which constituted ‘political opposition’, while John Cook extols the BBC’s Plays Department for providing ‘a special place for the expression of the individual, dissident or questioning voice’.<sup>4</sup> Right-wing journalist Simon Heffer emphasises how ‘English playwrights, living and dead’ have a role in raising British ‘cultural consciousness’, arguing that the BBC should extend ‘patronage’ and licence to dramatists.<sup>5</sup>

Glen Creeber perceives the British TV single-play as following the ‘everyday’ and ‘ordinary’ focus of Paddy Chayefsky’s realist dramas for US TV in the 1950s – like *Marty* (1953) – arguing that Sydney Newman brought such values to Armchair Theatre (1956-74) and TWP following his appointment as BBC Head of Drama in 1963.<sup>6</sup> Newman’s influence was ‘unmistakable’, screening TV plays by Exton, Owen and Pinter which ‘placed working-class and regional accents to the forefront of the action’.<sup>7</sup> Single-play strands’ ‘eclectic style and content’ made them harder to schedule and audience loyalty was less than for drama series with their ‘reassuring predictability’.<sup>8</sup>

PFT followed TWP (1964-1970), which emerged from the tradition of the writer-centric televised single-play. Sydney Newman, BBC Head of Drama (1963-69) developed TWP’s ethos, which he summed up in 1966 with his soundbite ‘agitational contemporaneity’.<sup>9</sup> Such politicised and topical WPs were spearheaded by producers James MacTaggart and Tony Garnett. However, TWP and PFT were far from uniformly politicised. As Creeber argues, and George W. Brandt demonstrates, the single-play became conceived of as

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<sup>2</sup> These quotes are in: Day-Lewis, S. (1998) *Talk of Drama: Views of the Television Dramatist Now and Then*. Luton: University of Luton Press, 218, 212.

<sup>3</sup> Sayle, A. (2016) *Thatcher Stole My Trousers*. London: Bloomsbury, 199-200.

<sup>4</sup> Rolinson, D. (2020) [2003] Play for Today introduction, **British Television Drama**, 16 Oct [online] Available at: [http://www.britishtelevisiondrama.org.uk/?page\\_id=858](http://www.britishtelevisiondrama.org.uk/?page_id=858) [accessed: 17/06/2022]; Cook, J.R. (1995) *Dennis Potter: A Life on Screen*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Heffer, S. (1999) *Nor Shall My Sword: The Reinvention of England*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 129.

<sup>6</sup> Creeber, G. (ed.) (2001) *The Television Genre Book*. London: BFI, 12.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Macmuraugh-Kavanagh, M.K. (1997) The BBC and the birth of ‘The Wednesday Play’, 1962-66: Institutional containment versus ‘agitational contemporaneity’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* (17)3, 374; Sendall, B. (1982) *Independent Television in Britain: Volume 1 – Origin and Foundation, 1946-62*. London: Macmillan Press, 338; Creeber (2001) *ibid.* 9. Newman coined his soundbite for an interview with the *Scotsman* published in August 1966.

‘literary’ in its ‘artistic themes and aspirations’ and has ‘tended to be conceived in high cultural regard, marketed and received differently from the likes of soap opera [...], drama series or mini-series’.<sup>10</sup> Producer Irene Shubik articulates her literary tastes, following her ‘scholar and gentleman’ predecessor Peter Luke’s comparatively non-political output, which included WPs by literary writers like Simon Raven, James Hanley, Patrick White and John Betjeman.<sup>11</sup> In her memoir, Shubik champions prose, radio and theatre writers like William Trevor, Rhys Adrian, Simon Gray, John Mortimer and David Rudkin.<sup>12</sup>

John Cook claims that MacTaggart and Roger Smith honed the TWP’s reputation for ‘controversy’ and ‘outrage’.<sup>13</sup> Creeber claims that the strand ‘got properly under way’ with James O’Connor’s *A Tap on the Shoulder* in January 1965, which Cook claims established TWP’s tone in ‘depicting the cynical progress of a villain from gangster to baronet’, ‘consciously breaking with the conventions of the polite, “well-made” TV play’.<sup>14</sup> The ‘determination to break new ground’ represented TWP’s ‘ethos’ which also involved providing a ‘showcase for new talent’.<sup>15</sup> Crucially, Smith recruited Tony Garnett and Kenith Trodd as assistant story editors: figures subsequently pivotal to the more politicised WPs and PfTs. Garnett’s agitational social realist production *Cathy Come Home* (1966) (hereafter *Cathy*) is, in most histories of British TV or TV drama, the most canonised WP or PfT, and is seen as influencing British society positively. Andrew Crisell and Phil Wickham assert its social utility by claiming it directly led to the forming of the homelessness charity Shelter; for Jack Williams it has been ‘thought to have stimulated’ its foundation and given ‘housing more political prominence’.<sup>16</sup> Janice Hadlow, Joe Moran and David Hendy more circumspectly claim that it boosted Shelter, formed fifteen days after *Cathy* was broadcast, while Hendy notes it led directly to Crisis being founded.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Creeber, G. (1998) *Dennis Potter: Between Two Worlds – A Critical Reassessment*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 19-24; Brandt, G.W. (1981) *British Television Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>11</sup> Shubik, I. (2000) [1975] *Play for Today: The evolution of television drama*, 2nd edn. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 59.

<sup>12</sup> However, Shubik’s eclecticism is discernible in her giving space in her book to more ‘social’ or political writers like Jim Allen, Tony Parker, Barry Reckord and Jeremy Sandford.

<sup>13</sup> Cook (2004) op. cit. 2512.

<sup>14</sup> Creeber (2001) op. cit. 13; Cook *ibid*.

<sup>15</sup> Cook *ibid*.

<sup>16</sup> Crisell, A. (2006) *A Study of Modern Television: Thinking Inside the Box*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 87; Wickham, P. (2007) *Understanding Television Texts*. London: British Film Institute, 49; Williams, J. (2004) *Entertaining the Nation: A Social History of British Television*. Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 88.

<sup>17</sup> Hadlow quoted in: Anon (2004) TV’s 50 most influential shows, *Broadcast*, 23 Jul, 22; Moran, J. (2013) *Armchair Nation: An intimate history of Britain in front of the TV*. London: Profile Books, 159-160; Hendy, D. (2022) *The BBC: A People’s History*. London: Profile Books, 426-427.

Sheila Rowbotham focuses more widely on how *Cathy* ‘graphically represented’ the persistence of social ‘inequalities’ in the 1960s.<sup>18</sup>

Graham Fuller argues that Garnett, Loach and Sandford’s work for TWP in the 1960s was followed in the 1970s by Jim Allen and Trevor Griffiths, whose ‘socialist realism’ often found a home in PFT.<sup>19</sup> Academics have often centred on how certain PFTs ran into trouble at the BBC. John Hill has traced contestations and milder censorship concerning Northern Ireland-set PFTs; Creeber and the *Drama out of a Crisis* (2020) documentary highlight manager Alasdair Milne’s banning of *Brimstone and Treacle* (1976) and *Scum* (1977) – commissioned as PFTs – for sexual content and language.<sup>20</sup> However, Wickham emphasises how prestigious single-dramas represented an ‘agreed excellence that broadcasters could point to when they were accused of pandering to populism’.<sup>21</sup> This suggests PFT’s practical utility to the BBC when justifying the licence fee or during government-initiated Committees of Enquiry into broadcasting like Annan in 1977. Indeed, Jim Allen’s left-wing historical drama series *Days of Hope* (1975), repeated in 1978 under the PFT banner, found official favour: Annan argued in pluralistic terms that such provocative dramas *should* be made in ‘the British tradition of freedom in broadcasting’.<sup>22</sup> PFTs like *Through the Night* (1975) and *Minor Complications* (1980) had tangible reformist impacts on, respectively, the NHS and medical negligence law; the latter led to a charity’s formation. These increased PFT’s prestige, alongside Welland’s socialist underdog drama *Leeds United!*, which Annan commended alongside *Monty Python’s Flying Circus* (1969-74) for its originality and non-conformism.<sup>23</sup>

Alasdair Milne traces the gradual decline in finances the BBC allocated to drama during Shaun Sutton’s tenure as Head of Drama (1969-81), while acclaiming the BBC’s purchase of Elstree Studios in his tenure as DG, which housed its first soap opera which was a major, lasting success, *EastEnders* (1985- ).<sup>24</sup> According to David Buckingham, *EastEnders* achieved its vast popularity in 1985-86 via its abrasive and topical qualities which strongly resembled PFT, but which entirely avoided didacticism and involved a

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<sup>18</sup> Rowbotham, S. (1999) *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States*. London: Penguin, 358.

<sup>19</sup> Fuller, G. (ed.) (1993) *Potter on Potter*. London: Faber and Faber, 15.

<sup>20</sup> Hill, J. (2017). Dominic Behan and the Beginnings of Television Troubles Drama, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, (37)1, 65-81; Hill, J. (2022) Play for Today and Northern Ireland in the 1970s, *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, (19)2, 217-240; Creeber (2001) op. cit. 13.

<sup>21</sup> Wickham op. cit. 108.

<sup>22</sup> HM Stationery Office (1977) *Report of the Annan Committee on the Future of Broadcasting*. London: Home Office, 278.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 80.

<sup>24</sup> Milne, A. (1988) *DG: The Memoirs of a British Broadcaster*. London: Hodder & Stoughton. 62, 134.

regular cast playing London working-class roles.<sup>25</sup> In parallel, there was a shift towards making exportable literary adaptations; unlike these, Carl Gardner and John Wyver discern, the single-play was too ‘idiosyncratic’ or ‘parochial’ to attract foreign buyers or co-production money.<sup>26</sup> By 1993, as Robin Nelson details, the single-play had almost disappeared from TV, supporting Brandt’s elegiac claim that TV drama’s ‘brightest moments of glory in the eighties may prove to have been the golden glow of a setting sun’.<sup>27</sup>

Several academics, journalists and TV practitioners have created a potent meta-narrative of a lost Golden Age. Jonathan Bignell, John Caughie and Lez Cooke have variously defined TV drama’s ‘Golden Age’ as 1955-75, 1965-75 or the 1960s-70s, echoing Sandbrook, Joe Moran, TV critic Chris Dunkley and novelist Jonathan Coe’s conception of a broader televisual Golden Age.<sup>28</sup> Critic Seán Day-Lewis perceives a ‘Golden Age’ of ‘writer-led’ TV drama, exemplified by TWP and PfT, and characterised by ‘variety and volume’.<sup>29</sup> Francis Wheen explicitly names PfT – alongside *Monty Python* and *World in Action* (1963-98) – in a canon of more intellectually-driven, ‘quality’ programmes which he distinguishes from the everyday flow.<sup>30</sup> In contrast with the decline of the single-play on ITV during the 1970s, Andrew Crisell notes the BBC’s support for a form which ‘made intellectual demands on the audience and created aesthetic satisfactions that could not be derived from the series or serial’.<sup>31</sup>

Writer-director Don Taylor saw the single-play as emblematic of a TV Golden Age, contemporaneous with his own career, that engaged with ideas and consciously spread

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<sup>25</sup> Buckingham, D. (1987) *Public Secrets: EastEnders and Its Audience*. London: BFI Publishing, 23, 42-43, 96. *EastEnders* included proportionately fewer middle-class characters than PfT and considerably less regional or national diversity (see Chapter 3).

<sup>26</sup> Gardner, C. & Wyver, J. (1983) The Single Play: From Reithian reverence to cost-accounting and censorship, *Screen*, (24)5, 118.

<sup>27</sup> Nelson, R. (2001) Studying Television Drama, in Creeber (ed.) op. cit. 8-9; Nelson, R. (2015) Studying Television Drama, in: Creeber, G. (ed.) *The Television Genre Book*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. London: BFI, 17; Brandt in: Brandt, G.W. (ed.) (1993) *British Television Drama in the 1980s*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 17.

<sup>28</sup> Bignell, J. (2007) Citing the classics: Constructing British television drama history in publishing and pedagogy, in: H. Wheatley (ed.) *Re-Viewing Television History: Critical Issues in Television Historiography*. London: I.B. Tauris, 38; Caughie, J. (2000) *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism & British Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 57-58; Cooke (2015) *British Television Drama: A History*, 2nd edn. London: British Film Institute, 4, 6; Sandbrook (2012) *Seasons in the Sun: The Battle for Britain, 1974-1979*. London: Penguin, 21; Moran (2013) op. cit. 206-210, 221-222; Dunkley quoted in: Wells, M. (2000) Fawley Towers tops list of TV Golden Oldies, *Guardian*, 6 Sep, 3; Coe, J. (2004) *The Rotters’ Club*. London: Penguin, 274. Caughie qualifies this by noting there were between five and ten plays for every *Up the Junction* (1965) ‘when the embers failed to glow’, but does not name any examples.

<sup>29</sup> Day-Lewis op. cit. iv, vii, 3-4. Day-Lewis also asserts that TV was a superior medium to film and theatre in 1956-82.

<sup>30</sup> Wheen, F. (2009) *Strange Days Indeed: The Golden Age of Paranoia*. London: Fourth Estate, 185-186.

<sup>31</sup> Crisell, A. (2002) *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London: Routledge, 200.

humanist values, informed by the Richard Hoggart-influenced conclusions of the 1962 Pilkington Report.<sup>32</sup> PFT writer-director David Hare echoed this, describing the TV single-play as ‘the most important new indigenous art form of the twentieth century’ which was ‘vandalised and then purposely eliminated by post-modernist hooligans at the BBC’.<sup>33</sup> Intervening on behalf of the Campaign for Quality Television, Steven Barnett and Emily Seymour criticised the Birt regime’s reapportioning of power in the BBC from producers and departmental heads to channel controllers: leading to ‘safer, genre-based programming’.<sup>34</sup>

In 2017, fulfilling Glen Creeber’s perception that the single-play is invoked as a symbol to attack contemporary TV, journalist Deborah Orr identified a current need for plays which address British life’s realities, invoking PFT as talismanic of a more engaged, activist public culture.<sup>35</sup> Amy Holdsworth has highlighted the BBC’s promotion of PFT writer Stephen Poliakoff as a residual trace of the ‘Golden Era’ they feel guilty about having terminated and a lone maverick ‘auteur’ afforded an autonomy mostly denied to other writers.<sup>36</sup> TV writers and directors like William Ivory, Bryan Elsley, Kay Mellor, Jimmy McGovern, Sally Wainwright, Russell T. Davies, Jack Thorne, Shane Meadows, Steve McQueen and Michaela Coel have made a variety of challenging, quality TV drama in the last 30 years. However, *most* of these creators’ work has been in series format; the lack of one-off dramas reflects a reduction in the nurturing of original voices that would enrich a pluralistic national culture. Yet, PFT’s influence remains significant and international. British writers and directors Jack Thorne, Meera Syal and Steve McQueen note its formative impact on their lives.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Matthew Weiner, creator of *Mad Men* (2007-15), and David Simon, creator of *The Wire* (2002-08), when growing up in the

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<sup>32</sup> Taylor, D. (1998) Pure imagination, poetry’s lyricism, Titian’s colours: Whatever happened to the studio play on British TV? *New Statesman*, 6 Mar, 39.

<sup>33</sup> Hare, D. (2005) *Obedience, Struggle & Revolt: Lectures on Theatre*. London: Faber and Faber, 54.

<sup>34</sup> Barnett, S. & Seymour, E. (1999) “A shrinking iceberg travelling south...” *Changing Trends in British Television: A case study of drama and current affairs* [Report], Sep. London: Campaign for Quality Television Ltd., 73. This echoed Peter Ansorge’s complaints that power over drama commissioning now rested in three individuals’ hands, in comparison to 50 producers in the 1970s: Ansorge, P. (1997) *From Liverpool to Los Angeles: On Writing for Theatre, Film and Television*. London: Faber and Faber, 16.

<sup>35</sup> Creeber (2001) op. cit. 9; Orr, D. (2017) Why can’t TV tap into these plays for today’s marginalised?, *Guardian*, 14 Jan [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/14/television-plays-for-today-theatre-love-wish-list-boy-austerity-britain> [accessed: 15/01/2017].

<sup>36</sup> Holdsworth, A. (2011) *Television, Memory and Nostalgia*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 114-117. Holdsworth sees Poliakoff’s nostalgic drama as more pliable for the BBC than Jimmy McGovern’s social realism. However, BBC TV’s current longest running one-off drama strand is *Jimmy McGovern’s Moving On* (2009- ).

<sup>37</sup> See comments about PFT by Jack Thorne, Meera Syal and Steve McQueen, in: BFI (2020) *BFI at Home – Play for Today* at 50, **YouTube**, 1 Oct [online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5aDqm33IEuE> [accessed: 01/08/2022]; Jones, A. (2014) Goodness Gracious Meera, *Independent*, 13 Nov, 44; Appendix 6.

1970s and 1980s, were both inspired by watching British dramas like PFT and *Traffik* (1989) because they ‘weren’t *allowed* to do stuff like that in America’.<sup>38</sup>

### **1.3. ‘Days of hopelessness’? Historical context, Britain 1970-1984**

The 1970s in Britain are widely perceived as a politically polarised time. Sandbrook and Francis Wheen see the early 1970s as the zenith of leftist advances, though without mentioning Dusty Hughes’s PFT *Commitments* (1982), set in 1973-74, which encapsulates this moment in depicting London flat-sharers who include left-wing activists.<sup>39</sup> Sandbrook quotes a poll in spring 1972 when 60% of people thought there was a class struggle in Britain: an impression mirrored culturally in how prime-time viewers were ‘confronted’ with sitcoms’ explicit and implicit political content and ‘the earnest proletarian sentiments’ of 1971-72 PFTs by Jim Allen, Jeremy Sandford, Tom Clarke and Dominic Behan.<sup>40</sup> Here, Sandbrook traduces four powerfully educative, complex dramas, while eliding, for example, whimsical and comedic contributions by Julia Jones and Peter Terson.

Conservative historians and journalists have long seen 1970s Britain as synonymous with political crisis and national decline: notably, Correlli Barnett, Martin J. Wiener and Christopher Booker.<sup>41</sup> American journalist Bernard D. Nossiter presciently highlighted how conservative commentators William Rees-Mogg, Robert Moss, Lord Alun Chalfont, and Peregrine Worsthorne, neoliberals like Samuel Brittan and Peter Jay and the US-based Hudson Institute had discursively constructed Britain as ‘Europe’s Sick Man’.<sup>42</sup> Common features of the ‘decline’ included that Britons were too attached to welfare provision and an increasingly ‘ungovernable’ democracy was threatened by trade unionism. Alwyn W. Turner identifies how Margaret Thatcher discursively cited *Days of Hope* in 1975 to berate the ‘days of hopelessness’ she associated with socialism.<sup>43</sup> The New Economics

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<sup>38</sup> Ansorge, P. (2021a) Interview with author, 8 Jan: Ansorge quoted David Hare about Weiner and notes that Simon specifically mentioned *Traffik*, which Ansorge commissioned at Channel 4 and which was directed by his fellow PFT alumni Alastair Reid.

<sup>39</sup> Wheen (2009) op. cit. 48-53; Sandbrook, D. (2011) *State of Emergency: The Way We Were: Britain 1970-1974*. London: Penguin, 311.

<sup>40</sup> Sandbrook (2011) *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Barnett, C. (1986) *The Audit of War: The Illusion and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation*. Basingstoke: Papermac; Booker, C. (1980) *The Seventies: Portrait of a Decade*. London: Allen Lane.

and Wiener, M.J. (1981) *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Declinism has also been propounded by the liberal-left journalist Francis Wheen and New Left thinker Stuart Hall and official BBC historian Jean Seaton: Wheen (2009) op. cit- 49-54; Hall interviewed in English, R. & Kenny, M. (eds.) (2000) *Rethinking British Decline*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 112; Seaton, J. (2015) ‘*Pinkoes and Traitors*’: *The BBC and the nation, 1974-1987*. London: Profile Books, 46.

<sup>42</sup> Nossiter, B.D. (1978) *Britain: A Future That Works*. London: Andre Deutsch, 11-43. See The Hudson Institute Europe (1974) *The United Kingdom in 1980: The Hudson Report*. London: Associated Business Programmes.

<sup>43</sup> Turner, A.W. (2008) *Crisis? What Crisis? Britain in the 1970s*. London: Aurum, 150.

Foundation, Andy Beckett, Lynne Segal, Daniel Rachel and David Edgerton offer contrasting left-wing reassessments of the 1970s, discerning significant advances by minority groups via political struggles which coalesced into a promising pluralism – for example, intersectional alliances supporting the Grunwick strike and Rock Against Racism.<sup>44</sup> PFT writer Bernard Kops claims Britain in the Seventies was not in decline, but merely ‘going through change’.<sup>45</sup>

Edgerton argues that Britain’s economic decline was only *relative* to other developed countries; if there was a ‘crisis’ it was for the rich, via a state-directed shift in power towards the average worker.<sup>46</sup> The neoliberal Dominic Sandbrook concurs when citing survey findings that, in 1977, 82% of Britons were satisfied with their lives, much higher than the French and Italians.<sup>47</sup> Edgerton’s perception of Britain at its social democratic apex is discernible in Michael Apted’s documentary *21 Up* (1977), in which the idealistic Lynn Johnson shows pride in her work as a children’s librarian: an ordinary woman benefiting from state largesse.

Sandbrook extols mainstream Britons’ primary leisure activity in the 1970s – watching TV – and their enjoyment of suburban family life, arguing that the satirical *Abigail’s Party* (1977) did not accord with most people’s attitudes.<sup>48</sup> Sandbrook highlights perceived failings of high-rise social housing and comprehensive education, citing as critics the nominally liberal PFT writers Malcolm Bradbury and Piers Paul Read.<sup>49</sup> Contrastingly, he notes Barry Hines’s loyalty to the working-class in *The Price of Coal* (1977, novel 1979) and *Looks and Smiles* (1981), works ‘steeped in affection for the dying world’ of the industrial North.<sup>50</sup> Journalist and PFT writer Andy McSmith argues that a decline in class consciousness accompanied the stark ‘Two Nations’ divide that Thatcher’s governments created from 1979: leading to New Labour’s embrace of ‘liberal capitalism’.<sup>51</sup> Historian Andy Beckett perceives the rightwards cultural shift in how the upbeat, Oscar-winning feature-film *Chariots of Fire* (1981), produced by the Labour-supporting David Puttnam

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<sup>44</sup> New Economics Foundation (2004) *Chasing Progress: Beyond measuring economic growth* [report] London: NEF; Beckett, A. (2009) *When the Lights Went Out: Britain in the Seventies*. London: Faber and Faber; Segal, L. (2013) Jam today: feminist impacts and transformations in the 1970s, in: L. Black, H. Pemberton & P. Thane (eds.) *Reassessing 1970s Britain*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 149-166; Rachel, D. (2016) *Walls Come Tumbling Down: The Music and Politics of Rock Against Racism, 2 Tone and Red Wedge 1976-1992*. London: Picador (Macmillan); Edgerton, D. (2018) *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation: A Twentieth Century History*. London: Allen Lane (Penguin).

<sup>45</sup> Kops, B. (2020) Email to author via Hannah Burman, 15 Jul.

<sup>46</sup> Edgerton *ibid.* 406-407.

<sup>47</sup> Sandbrook (2011) *op. cit.* 347.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 346.

<sup>49</sup> Sandbrook (2012) *op. cit.* 376.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> McSmith, A. (2011) *No Such Thing as Society: A History of Britain in the 1980s*. London: Constable, 341.

and written by PFT key player Colin Welland, represents resurgent liberal individualism and nationalism and found favour with many Tory MPs and Ronald Reagan.<sup>52</sup> Welland's shift in the late 1970s away from working for TV and towards feature-films was matched by other key PFT writers Arthur Hopcraft and John Hopkins; many of the latter's Hollywood projects went unrealised.<sup>53</sup>

#### **1.4. Democratic pluralism or cynical nostalgia? Cultural context, Britain 1970-1984**

From 1956 on, the Arts in Britain have been perceived as subject to class democratisation. Donald Horne discerned an increase in working-class writers in literature, TV and cinema whose work had working-class settings and conveyed a 'sense of doubt'.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, David Hendy notes Alfred Bradley and Alan Plater's pioneering radio anthology, *The Northern Drift* (1964-70), which broadcast stories and sketches by Barry Hines and Trevor Griffiths among others.<sup>55</sup> Peter Anson identifies a Liverpool tradition, valuing the complex humanism of localised writers Alan Bleasdale and Willy Russell and is critical of British creative industries' philosophical and geographical passage to Los Angeles in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>56</sup> Anson sees the TV single-play as part of a cultural heritage alongside John Osborne's theatre play *Look Back in Anger* (1956) and British New Wave cinema (1959-63) and closer to the values of post-Second World War European art cinema than to modern Hollywood, which he sees as anti-humanist in prioritising spectacle and action over ideas, values and characters.

Key PFT figures Mike Leigh and Ken Loach note the significance of, respectively, directors Luis Buñuel and Yasujiro Ozu and Italian Neo-Realism and the Czech New Wave in helping them formulate their contrasting humanistic film-making styles.<sup>57</sup> For such practitioners and many film critics, cosmopolitan art cinema is implicitly regarded as superior to British cinema in the 1970s, which marked a historical 'low-point'.<sup>58</sup> PFT redressed this through its increasing numbers of all-filmed productions and David Rolinson

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<sup>52</sup> Beckett, A. (2015) *Promised You A Miracle: Why 1980-82 Made Modern Britain*. London: Allen Lane, 31-38.

<sup>53</sup> Day-Lewis (1998) op. cit. 218.

<sup>54</sup> Horne, D. (1970) *God is an Englishman*. London: Angus and Robertson, 247.

<sup>55</sup> Hendy (2022) op. cit. 424-425.

<sup>56</sup> Anson (1997) op cit.

<sup>57</sup> Fuller, G. (ed.) (1998) *Loach on Loach*. London: Faber and Faber, 38; Cardullo, B. (2010) "Making People Think Is What It's All About": An Interview with Mike Leigh, *Cinema Journal*, 50, 1, 13.

<sup>58</sup> Even an avowed 'art' film, Lindsay Anderson's *O Lucky Man!* (1973), comes in for heavy criticism from Colin McCabe for its stereotyping and political cynicism: McCabe, C. (1974) Realism and the Cinema: Notes on some Brechtian Theses, *Screen*, (15)2, Summer, 7-27. See John Walker for a characteristic account of the 1970s as British cinema's low point: Walker, J. (1985) *The Once and Future Film: British Cinema in the Seventies and Eighties*. London: Methuen.

has argued that TV films constituted the real ‘national cinema’ during the 1970s and 1980s; while creators David Hare, Stephen Frears and Mike Leigh have noted how they could not have made it in the commercial industry.<sup>59</sup>

In PFT’s time, the term ‘culture’ was heavily contested. In 1975, historian Tom Nairn documented the pre-eminence of an insular English intelligentsia, whose ideology was a nostalgic conservative romanticism, mythically valorising organic rural community, as exemplified by Peter Hall’s film of Ronald Blythe’s 1969 book *Akenfield* (1974).<sup>60</sup> This elite venerated a ‘Great Tradition’ of English literature and their ‘common-sense’ included the evils of cities, industry, capitalism, motorways, comprehensives, polytechnics, modernism and all universalising continental theory, including Marxism and semiotics.<sup>61</sup> In contrast to the elitists T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis, who broadly defined culture as consisting of a canon defined and appreciated by scholarly experts, Raymond Williams and Lawrence Alloway accepted the mass media and popular culture as worthy of study on a par with the traditional Arts. Williams argued that ‘culture is ordinary’: that which is enjoyed widely, while Alloway perceived an inclusive ‘long front’ of culture, which should simply be ‘what a society does’: ‘unique oil paintings and highly personal poems as well as mass-distributed films and group-aimed magazines can be placed within a continuum rather than frozen in layers in a pyramid’.<sup>62</sup>

The Williams-Alloway model of culture, dissolving demarcations between pop and art, was subsequently supported by generous Arts patronage and subsidy, pioneered by Jennie Lee, Arts minister in Harold Wilson’s 1960s Labour governments, which directly enabled countercultural activities and the growth in fringe theatre from 1968-1975.<sup>63</sup> Alternative approaches in theatre and TV were enabled by institutional faith in the ‘right to fail’. This was a theatre phrase coined by director Tony Richardson, and circulated by critics like Philip Hope-Wallace, Kenneth Tynan and Martin Esslin and the dramatist John Osborne,

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<sup>59</sup> Hill, J. (2011) *Ken Loach: The Politics of Film and Television*. London: British Film Institute, 132.

<sup>60</sup> Nairn, T. (1975) The English Literary Intelligentsia, *Bananas*, 3, 17-22. *Bananas* (1975-81) was a literary periodical, founded by Emma Tennant; its varied writers, like J.G. Ballard, Jorge Luis Borges, Angela Carter, Ted Hughes, Heathcote Williams and Peter Wollen, generally defied the elite tradition Nairn identifies. Six one-time PFT writers – Beryl Bainbridge, Douglas Dunn, Marcella Evaristi, Elaine Feinstein, Jehane Markham and Ian McEwan – and the actor Ken Campbell, had stories or poems published in *Bananas*.

<sup>61</sup> This nostalgic conservationist tendency, which included anti-capitalist left-wing writers like William Morris and E.P. Thompson, is tangibly felt in PFT.

<sup>62</sup> Williams, R. (2014) [1958] Culture is Ordinary, in: J. McGuigan (ed.) *Raymond Williams on Culture and Society: Essential Writings*. London: SAGE Publications, 1-18; Alloway, L. (1959) The Long Front of Culture, *Cambridge Opinion*, 17, 30-33.

<sup>63</sup> See Robert Hewison for an expansive overview and Peter Anson for an illuminating contemporary account: Hewison, R. (1986) *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties 1960-75*. London: Methuen; Anson, P. (1975) *Disrupting the Spectacle: Five Years of Experimental and Fringe Theatre in Britain*. London: Pitman Publishing.

to describe the Royal Court's ethos of encouraging intellectually challenging and formally experimental work.<sup>64</sup>

While Joan Littlewood's impact on PFT is less directly significant than Irene Shubik's, her and Ewan MacColl's Theatre Workshop – more than that of Bertolt Brecht – deeply influenced PFT creators like John McGrath, Mike Leigh, Roger Smith, Tony Garnett, Colin Welland and Barrie Keeffe.<sup>65</sup> Many Theatre Workshop alumnae worked on PFT: as actors, Ann Beach, Edmond Bennett, Avis Bunnage, Isla Cameron, Larry Dann, Griffith Davies, Phil Davis, Bettina Dickson, Glynn Edwards, Dudley Foster, John Gower, Sheila Hancock, Nigel Hawthorne (nine times), Godfrey James, John Junkin, Richard Kane, Marjie Lawrence, Eileen Kennally, Roy Kinnear, George Sewell and John Thaw; as writers, Robin Chapman, Julia Jones and Henry Livings.<sup>66</sup> Littlewood's and Peter Cheeseman's populist, experimental approaches – more compromising, upbeat and pleasure-centred than Brecht's – broke the class barriers of the proscenium arch and adapted theatrical spaces to better communicate with spectators in their own language.<sup>67</sup> As Lez Cooke reveals, Cheeseman was involved in successfully adapting his company's Victoria Theatre work for TV.<sup>68</sup> This mirrored the democratising ideals of Sydney Newman and David Rose, who encouraged devolutionary and experimental TV drama. Theatre Workshop's stated aim to 'face up to contemporary problems', using 'a living language' to 'comment as fearlessly on Society as did Ben Jonson and Aristophanes' strongly anticipates the TWP-PFT ethos.<sup>69</sup>

Such influences enabled theatrical and televisual cultures which overlapped and mutually supported each other, helping writers of diverse class and geography like Harold Pinter, Alun Owen, Jim Allen, Alan Plater and Jack Rosenthal have their work performed to varied audiences. Billy Smart claims that the BBC strand Festival (1963-64) – which adapted many avant-garde theatre plays – gained a high-brow image and was perceived as

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<sup>64</sup> Hope-Wallace, P. (1961) Views of the Stage, *Guardian*, 23 Feb, 8; Tynan, K. (1963) Dramatists in perspective, *Observer*, 15 Sep, 27; Esslin, M. (1966) The Critic's Role, *Times*, 14 Jul, 15; Osborne, J. (1978) King of the Court, *Observer*, 28 May, 29.

<sup>65</sup> See McGrath, J. (1996) *A Good Night Out. Popular Theatre: Audience, Class and Form*. London: Nick Hern Books, 44-49; Coveney, M. (1997) *The World According to Mike Leigh*. London: HarperCollins 102; Garnett, T. (2016) *The Day the Music Died: A Life Lived Behind the Lens*. London: Constable, 140; Madden, P. & Wilson, D. (1975) The Communal Touch: The Television Plays of Colin Welland, *Sight and Sound*, Spring, 118.

<sup>66</sup> In addition, Joby Blanshard, Patience Collier, Diana Coupland, Fanny Carby, Howard Goorney, Miriam Karlin and *EastEnders'* co-creator Tony Holland worked on TWP. See Goorney, H. (1981) *The Theatre Workshop Story*. London: Eyre Methuen. Writer Robin Chapman's PFT work shows his personal political shift to the right.

<sup>67</sup> See Holdsworth, N. (2006) *Joan Littlewood*. Abingdon: Routledge, 13, 23.

<sup>68</sup> Cooke, L. (2022) Regional drama from stage to screen: television adaptations by Peter Cheeseman's Victoria Theatre company, in: A. Wrigley & J. Wyver (eds.) *Screen Plays: Theatre plays on British television*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 131-149.

<sup>69</sup> Goorney op. cit. 42; Leach, R. (2006) *Theatre Workshop: Joan Littlewood and the Making of Modern British Theatre*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 49.

being for ‘people-in-the-know’, while John Cook argues more widely that the ‘mass audience’ had ‘little or no interest’ in the single-play.<sup>70</sup> However, in the early 1960s, TV enabled Harold Pinter’s plays to regularly reach audiences of a size impossible in the theatre.<sup>71</sup> PFT reached an average audience of 5.63 million per week, so it was *not* an exclusive concern, though audience sizes varied according to the style of play (see Chapter 3 and Appendix 5).<sup>72</sup>

Kieran Curran has perceptively discerned how cynicism and nostalgia were pervasive across the Arts in Britain from the 1950s-1980s.<sup>73</sup> Curran implies that this structure of feeling foreclosed the possibility of left-wing action or reform, and prevented pluralistic alliance-building. He claims that John Osborne constructs his plays around embittered, nostalgic men like Jimmy Porter and Archie Rice, who convey declinist perspectives, and identifies another PFT writer Stephen Poliakoff’s trenchant anti-modernist scorn for Brutalist architecture, motorways and muzak.<sup>74</sup> While Curran does not name many idealists who counter this trend, PFT dramatists like Caryl Churchill, David Edgar, Trevor Griffiths, Barrie Keeffe, Bernard Kops, John McGrath and Horace Ové demonstrate there *was* a counter-tendency, even if their works do not always avoid fatalism.<sup>75</sup> John McGrath perceptively notes that ‘any drama in which the working class actually wins a victory is a rarity, almost an impossibility. Try suggesting a play about Saltley Gates to Alasdair Milne’.<sup>76</sup> In 1998, the documentarian Roger Graef felt that British TV had forsaken the ‘right to fail’ and become much less risk-taking than in the 1970s.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Smart, B. (2017) Drama for people ‘in the know’: Television World Theatre (BBC 1957-59) and Festival (BBC 1963-64), *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, (37)1, 34-48; Cook (1995) op. cit. 149.

<sup>71</sup> Joan Kemp-Welch’s production of *The Birthday Party* (1960) was seen by nearly 11 million people: Billington, M. (1996) *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter*. London: Faber and Faber, 110; Cowan, M. (1960) The world of Harold Pinter, *The Stage and Television Today*, 5 May, 19.

<sup>72</sup> Cook’s claim is historically apt, as Potter’s PFT which furthers the idea of a gulf between PFT writers and their target working-class audience is *Only Make Believe* (1973), broadcast in the series of PFT’s lowest popularity. However, PFT significantly enlarged its audience reach in 1973-77 (see Appendices 4 and 5).

<sup>73</sup> Curran, K. (2015) *Cynicism in British Post-War Culture: Ignorance, Dust and Disease*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 102. Curran notes how one 7:84 cast member felt cynical about McGrath’s upbeat socialist theatre ethic, seeing it as patronising to audiences. McGrath notes that some critics made the same accusation, but counter-argues that ‘working-class audiences have minds of their own and they like to hear what your mind is’: McGrath (1996) op. cit. 54.

<sup>76</sup> McGrath *ibid.* 112.

<sup>77</sup> Graef, R. (1998) The flipside of flop, *Guardian*, 5 Jan, A2A.

## **1.5. ‘A model of our country as a whole’<sup>78</sup>: the BBC and Play for Today**

The BBC has been rhetorically analogised to expansive, labyrinthine institutions like Christian churches and nation states, both democratic and totalitarian.<sup>79</sup> In 1958, Hugh Carleton Greene, the modernising, liberal DG (1960-69) when TWP started, referred to the BBC News division as akin to ‘the Kremlin’.<sup>80</sup> Tony Garnett recalls Stuart Hood as a rare Marxist in the BBC who, like Greene, had a background in intelligence and had risen to Board of Management level, who echoed Greene’s Kremlin comparison, though Garnett emphasises that most BBC powerbrokers held Tory or moderately Labour views.<sup>81</sup>

In 1970, Nicholas Garnham called the BBC’s Reithian legacy a directly ‘elitist concept, an attempt to construct a National Church for a united nation’.<sup>82</sup> TV critic Philip Purser saw the BBC as being steered by Greene to evolve beyond its serious, anti-industrialist Reithian values to become more vivacious, while Joan Bakewell and Garnham saw it as tentatively becoming ‘more egalitarian’.<sup>83</sup> Memoirs of the following three DGs Charles Curran (1969-77), Ian Trethowan (1977-82) and Alasdair Milne (1982-87) bear out Garnett’s impression of BBC bosses belonging to the political centre-ground in their personal moderation.<sup>84</sup>

Curran emphasises drama’s pluralistic role in giving varied voices a say, valuing dramatists’ freedom to provoke by presenting ‘the new and unusual’ and tackling controversial themes and ‘difficult problems’.<sup>85</sup> Curran’s purported ‘liberal [...] civilized’ outlook belies cautious, conservative decisions made during 1975-77.<sup>86</sup> Curran and Trethowan articulate Reithian views that are strikingly close to the Bennite Left and conservative Right in being sceptical of the market: a stark contrast from Checkland and Birt’s later neoliberal regimes.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Purser, P. (1972b) How Aunty changed her face and ours, *Sunday Telegraph*, 29 Oct, 7.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid; Ian Trethowan compares the BBC’s unique organisational ethos with the Communist Party, the Catholic Church and the Civil Service: Trethowan, I. (1984) *Split Screen*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 102.

<sup>80</sup> Burns, T. (1977) *The BBC: Public Institution and Private World*. London: Macmillan, 167.

<sup>81</sup> Garnett (2016) op. cit. 122.

<sup>82</sup> Bakewell, J. & Garnham, N. (1970) *The New Priesthood: British Television Today*. London: Allen Lane, the Penguin Press, 305.

<sup>83</sup> Purser op. cit; Bakewell & Garnham ibid. 1-2.

<sup>84</sup> See Trethowan ibid. 26, 54, 60; Burns explains BBC employees’ internalised perceptions of balance. Both Trethowan and Milne came from rigorous news journalism backgrounds and were influenced, respectively, by Harold Evans and Grace Wyndham Goldie: Burns op. cit. 192.

<sup>85</sup> Curran, C. (1979) *A Seamless Robe: Broadcasting – Philosophy and Practice*. London: William Collins Sons & Co., 92, 95, 123, 344-345. Curran quotes the phrase ‘the new and unusual’ from the 1962 Pilkington Report.

<sup>86</sup> Curran, C. ibid. 126. See also Trethowan op. cit. 131.

<sup>87</sup> Curran, C. ibid. 92; Trethowan ibid. 208. Curran uses more religious language to argue this.

Historian Asa Briggs has cautioned against viewing the BBC as united or ‘monolithic’ as an entity.<sup>88</sup> The sociologist Tom Burns called the BBC a ‘social-industrial complex’, with many competing currents, but the whole being ultimately dependent on the government of the day renewing its Royal Charter every decade.<sup>89</sup> Burns refers to the BBC as a quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation: a Quango, theoretically independent and not directly censored by government, but having to keep government onside to survive.<sup>90</sup> The BBC’s traditional pyramidal hierarchy consists of a Director-General at the top, whom the Board of Management (BOM) report to; then, programme producers who report to the BOM, while programme makers report to those who commissioned them – in Pft’s day, producers or departmental Heads; more recently, channel controllers. A BBC report for its General Advisory Council describes the DG as ‘the editor-in-chief’ who would adjudge whether producers had done their duty and ‘referred’ controversial programmes ‘up’ to the BOM.<sup>91</sup> This was largely symbolic: producers would second-guess what might cause problems higher up; therefore, many were conditioned to self-censor and avoid more challenging content.<sup>92</sup>

The effective ‘middle-men’ between the government and the BBC are the Board of Governors (BOG). The BOG, according to Trethowan, legally ‘are the BBC’ and have ‘ultimate power’.<sup>93</sup> They act as the BBC’s public-facing guardians or trustees, whom the BOM report to for regular meetings where both sides would wrangle over BBC output. In Pft’s era, the BOG included representatives of commerce, trade unionism and the national regions, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The BOG’s composition has an establishment bias due to Governors being government appointees.<sup>94</sup> As the Thatcher government won successive terms in office, it moulded the BOG in its own image, with a succession of right-wing appointees like Sir William Rees-Mogg, Daphne Park and the ex-Labour MP Joel Barnett. As Trethowan’s successor Alasdair Milne recounts, these governors waged a perpetual war against the BOM.<sup>95</sup> In January 1987, the Tory government’s appointed Chairman Marmaduke Hussey forced Milne’s resignation.

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<sup>88</sup> Briggs, A. (1995) *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, vol. 5: Competition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 747.

<sup>89</sup> Burns op. cit. 1.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 192.

<sup>91</sup> BBC (1973) *Taste and standards in BBC programmes: A study by the BBC for its General Advisory Council*, Jan. London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 11; Burns ibid. 195.

<sup>92</sup> Burns ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Trethowan op. cit. 151.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Milne (1988) op. cit. 19-20, 37, 143-148, 201.

In contrast to Jean Seaton's favourable account of the BBC as a responsible cultural and political arbiter that needed its Checkland-Birt reforms, Georgina Born gives a detailed ethnographic critique of these reforms and Tom Mills sees the BBC, from the General Strike to Corbyn, as an instrument of the establishment, noting how, from 1935-85, BBC management proposed and oversaw extensive MI5 vetting of its staff.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, Head of Plays James Cellan-Jones expresses guilt over not employing Roy Battersby, while Tony Garnett had to use a threat to resign to ensure Roland Joffé was employed to direct *The Spongers* (1978).<sup>97</sup> Garnett was significant to how the BBC's image changed in the Greene era via its drama output. Garnett saw TWP as being a 'National Theatre of the Air' for 'people of all classes'.<sup>98</sup> This self-described working-class 'ruffian', along with James MacTaggart and Roger Smith, implemented Reith's ideals in a democratising way that Reith would not have liked by representing and legitimising working-class spaces and voices.<sup>99</sup> Garnett, a secular socialist, uses the spiritual language of commitment and vocation: 'week after week we had the opportunity to speak to millions. I saw it as an almost sacred responsibility'.<sup>100</sup> This was echoed by other PFT creators. Producer-director Richard Eyre quoted writer Tom Clarke on how working for the BBC was 'like working for a cross between the Church and the post office'.<sup>101</sup>

The radical Garnett articulates the advice of Head of Drama Sydney Newman, a working-class Canadian immigrant, on the compromises a national broadcaster must make: 'In this country. [...] You *cannot piss on the Queen*. But if you do... you have to do it *very carefully*.'<sup>102</sup> Garnett notes the need to act politically and covertly to make radical work within the system: his producer ally Kenith Trodd 'schemes and whispers in ears [...] If casting a Medici cardinal, he would be my first choice.'<sup>103</sup> Eyre concurred: 'It can be infuriating and attritional to contend with official sanctimoniousness coupled with institutional inertia [but it was] exhilarating to work with talented people who operate with guerrilla cunning and efficiency within the system'.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Seaton (2015) op. cit.; Born, G. (2004) *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC*. London: Secker & Warburg; Mills, T. (2016) *The BBC: Myth of a Public Service*. London: Verso.

<sup>97</sup> Cellan-Jones, J. (2006) *Forsythe and Hindsight or Screen Directing for Pleasure and Profit: The Memoirs of James Cellan Jones*. Dudley: Kaleidoscope Publishing, 71; Garnett in: *Left of Frame: The Rise and Fall of Radical TV Drama* (2006).

<sup>98</sup> Garnett (2016) op. cit. 133.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. 125.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 133.

<sup>101</sup> Eyre, R. (1987) Langham Diary, *Listener*, 17 Sep, 12.

<sup>102</sup> Garnett (2016) op. cit. 125.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. 129.

<sup>104</sup> Eyre (1987) op. cit.

Tom Burns claims, via oral history accounts, that, in 1963, the BBC's Drama department was perceived as less important than its Talks, News and Current Affairs divisions, but under Sydney Newman's leadership, Drama 'took quite a hold', but by 1973 had lost its fleeting pre-eminence.<sup>105</sup> In 1970, BBC managers still valued drama highly, rhetorically at least. BBC1 Controller Paul Fox stressed the importance of TWP's 'regular spot': the 'only' place where there is 'new and contemporary writing done every week', claiming this distinguished the BBC from ITV, selectively excluding Armchair Theatre.<sup>106</sup> BBC Managing Director, Television, Huw Wheldon advocated a balanced drama schedule including the single-play: 'It is unthinkable to me that a good television service should not have contemporary plays written by contemporary authors on contemporary issues'.<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, as Asa Briggs details, the context for regional drama was propitious: Pebble Mill was opened in November 1971, enabling BBC Birmingham to increase its TV output during 1970-74 by 1,400 hours.<sup>108</sup> This included many more PFTs shot on film (see Appendix 5 for a statistical analysis of Pebble Mill's impact). While, in 1973, 80% of BBC resources were still concentrated in London, the rise of BBC broadcasting bases in Birmingham, Belfast and Glasgow marked a comparative decentring from London (see Chapter 4).

Managers and overseers of the BBC used a discourse of realism to underwrite the credentials of radical plays. The Annan Committee, when reporting on 'Bad Language', asserted that 'the plea of authenticity' justified inclusion of swearing in *Leeds United!* (1974), while criticising a 1976 edition of ITV's *Today* (1968-77) for gratuitous swearing.<sup>109</sup> BOG Chairman Michael Swann's evidence to Annan describes the BBC's work as providing 'social cement' to unite the nation, while also being an arbiter of 'balance'.<sup>110</sup> Swann sees national events like royal weddings and police dramas which 'reinforce' the social status quo as balanced by documentaries and dramas which 'challenge' the powerful.<sup>111</sup> Annan views instances of the latter as anti-establishment, expressing feelings that conservative police dramas cannot adequately balance 'a politically committed documentary-drama denouncing the corruption of politicians, trade unionists, company directors, and social workers who are all portrayed as part of a vast conspiracy to defraud and stamp on the poor'.<sup>112</sup> This echoes John Hill's findings that BBC

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<sup>105</sup> Burns op. cit. 253.

<sup>106</sup> Bakewell & Garnham op. cit. 234.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 231, 235-237.

<sup>108</sup> Briggs op. cit. 806-808, 998-999.

<sup>109</sup> HM Stationery Office op. cit. 258.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. 263.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

managers saw *Leeds United!* and *Days of Hope* as falling outside the political ‘consensus’ and, therefore, supposedly ‘legitimate’ political debate.<sup>113</sup> When asked why there were so many left-wing polemical plays, DG Charles Curran told Annan that ‘balance in this field was exceedingly difficult as so few right-wing plays were written. The problem was not one of what is acceptable but what is available’.<sup>114</sup>

While Swann stands up for documentary and drama as left-wing counterweights, he could have cited BBC Managing Director, Television, Alasdair Milne’s claim that the amount of ‘politically inspired’ writing ‘has never been more than a minute part of our output’.<sup>115</sup> In October 1975, on the request of the BOG following *Days of Hope*, Milne wrote a briefing document for the DG Curran that distinguished ‘political’ plays by Welland, Allen, Griffiths, McGrath and Joyce Neary from a larger number of ‘social’ plays by Dunn, Sandford, Mercer, Tony Parker and others.<sup>116</sup> Such managerial defensiveness supports Hill’s claim that BBC Drama was ‘more carefully patrolled’ from 1974-75 on, as does director Roy Battersby’s blacklisting for his WRP membership.<sup>117</sup> Managers became more interventionist in certain cases. In 1976-77, Milne banned dramas commissioned as PFTs like Dennis Potter’s *Brimstone and Treacle* and Roy Minton’s *Scum* for their language and violent and sexual content. Milne justifies his ban of the former by claiming it made him feel ‘physically sick’ and that audiences should not be outraged.<sup>118</sup>

However, PFTs by writers like David Edgar, Trevor Griffiths, Howard Brenton, David Leland, Jim Allen, Caryl Churchill and Horace Ové were made during the strand’s comparatively politicised Matheson-Eyre-Trodd era of 1977-81, including the Left-inclined but complex *Comedians* (1979) and *United Kingdom* (1981). This author and Sally Shaw have illuminated how *Destiny* (1978) and *A Hole in Babylon* (1979) dramatised controversial, troubling contemporary issues and were steadfastly supported by senior

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<sup>113</sup> Hill, J. (2013) From Five Women to Leeds United!: Roy Battersby and the Politics of ‘Radical’ Television Drama’, *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, (10)1, 146.

<sup>114</sup> HM Stationery Office op. cit. 263.

<sup>115</sup> Milne, A. (1975) The Committed Drama, 16 Oct. BBC WAC T62/223 – Drama Programmes: Policy.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Hill (2013) op. cit. 146.

<sup>118</sup> Milne (1988) op. cit. 65.

BBC figures.<sup>119</sup> The DG Ian Trethowan himself praised *Destiny* and the previous week's *The Spongers* in a BOM meeting as 'polemical, but credible'.<sup>120</sup>

PfT's questioning radicalism continued comparatively strongly beyond the strand's demise, until Malcolm McKay's *Airbase* and Charles Wood's *Tumbledown* (both 1988). These controversial, military-themed one-off productions by PfT veterans Roger Gregory and Richard Eyre, respectively, generated charged debate in the press; the latter gained 10 million viewers.<sup>121</sup> Later, the Thatcher government's Broadcasting Act 1990 and DG John Birt's 'Producer Choice' made the BBC risk-averse and over-centralised. Richard Eyre regards BBC as a precious psycho-geographical space and bluntly described the Birt era BBC's market-led orientation towards ratings as 'a crisis of faith', juxtaposing *EastEnders*, which was 'made in [...] good faith [...] in a spirit of innocence, enthusiasm, and energetic commitment', with *Eldorado* (1992-93), '[which] was mired in cynicism and the torpor of disaffection'.<sup>122</sup> This pervasive loss of nerve was symbolised, for David Edgar, by how Trevor Griffiths's *Food for Ravens* (1997) was only allocated a Sunday 11:15pm time slot on BBC2.<sup>123</sup>

## **1.6. A historiography of Play for Today within television and film studies**

Both Jonathan Bignell and Robin Nelson highlight the foundational importance of Brandt's *British Television Drama* (1981) – which, claimed the former, focused on the 'complexity, social engagement, originality or ambiguity' of authorship; the latter states it 'helped to establish drama on television as an object worthy of study'.<sup>124</sup> This attitude informs John Tulloch's authorial study of Trevor Griffiths and Bignell and Sarah Cardwell's 'Television Series' books, which generally analysed specific writers, not directors or producers.<sup>125</sup> While Bignell acknowledges the 'return to authorship' inherent in the 'Television Series' project, he clarifies its mixed methodology: fusing TV history, textual analysis and the life histories of the selected TV professionals, while also exploring cultural theories through

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<sup>119</sup> May, T. (2017) An ideology red, white and blue in tooth and claw': David Edgar's *Destiny* (1978) – Part 2 of 3, **British Television Drama**, 1 Jun [online] Available at:

<http://www.britishtelevisiondrama.org.uk/?p=7040>, <http://www.britishtelevisiondrama.org.uk/?p=7043> [accessed: 01/08/2022]; Shaw, S. (2015) Screening black political struggle on 1970s British Television: the case of the Play for Today, *A Hole in Babylon* (1979), *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, (35)3, 489-502.

<sup>120</sup> May *ibid*.

<sup>121</sup> For a critical front-page response, see: Absalom, S. (1988) FALKLANDS RETREAT BY THE BBC, *Daily Mail*, 1 Jun, 1.

<sup>122</sup> Eyre quoted in: Barnett, S. & Curry, A. (1994) *The Battle for the BBC: A British Broadcasting Conspiracy?* London: Aurum Press, 237.

<sup>123</sup> Edgar, D. (2005) What are we telling the nation? *London Review of Books*, 7 Jul, 16-20.

<sup>124</sup> Bignell (2007) *op. cit.* 28-29; Nelson (2001) *op. cit.* 8-9.

<sup>125</sup> Tulloch, J. (1990) *Television drama: agency, audience, and myth*. London: Routledge.

their case-studies.<sup>126</sup> My Chapter 5 contains case-studies analysing the complementary liberal and socialist humanism of two PFT dramatists, while maintaining analysis of aesthetics, style, reception and socio-historical context. Nelson praises Tulloch's anti-relativism in privileging the authorship of Trevor Griffiths over others, influenced by Janet Wolff's call to retrieve the author 'from the brink of death' following Barthesian poststructuralism.<sup>127</sup> Nelson links Brandt's location of TV drama in a discourse of 'quality' in a literary-theatrical tradition which canonised individual writers with the BBC managerial discourses David Buckingham collects, which burnished soap opera *EastEnders*' credentials by associating it with the "cultural high-ground" of the single-play'.<sup>128</sup>

Following Brandt's key 1981 edited collection of writer-based essays, much published literature relating to PFT consists of authorial studies. For writers, see Andy Willis on Jim Allen; Kara McKechnie on Alan Bennett; Sarah Cardwell on Andrew Davies; David Forrest and Sue Vice on Barry Hines; Marilyn J. Richtarik on Stewart Parker and Sue Vice and Kate Dunn on Jack Rosenthal.<sup>129</sup> In her analysis of 1970s theatre, Catherine Itzin refers to a small range of TV plays by David Mercer, Arnold Wesker, David Hare and Trevor Griffiths.<sup>130</sup> Griffiths has been well served in books by Michael Poole and John Wyver, John Tulloch, Stanton B. Garner Jr. and articles by Leah Panos.<sup>131</sup> Dennis Potter's life and work has been even more dissected than Griffiths's, with studies by John Cook, W. Stephen Gilbert, Humphrey Carpenter and Glen Creeber, with interviews by Graham

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<sup>126</sup> Bignell (2007) op. cit. 31-36.

<sup>127</sup> Nelson (2001) op. cit.

<sup>128</sup> Nelson *ibid.*; Buckingham op. cit. 29.

<sup>129</sup> Willis, A. (2008) Jim Allen: radical drama beyond Days of Hope, *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 12(2), 300-17; McKechnie, K. (2007) *The Television Series: Alan Bennett*. Manchester: Manchester University Press; Cardwell, S. (2005) *The Television Series: Andrew Davies*. Manchester: Manchester University Press; Forrest, D. & Vice, S. (2018) *Barry Hines: Kes, Threads and Beyond*. Manchester: Manchester University Press; Richtarik, M. (2014) *Stewart Parker: A Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Vice, S. (2009) *The Television Series: Jack Rosenthal*. Manchester: Manchester University Press; Dunn, K. (2011) REPORT: Responses to Rosenthal: A Comparison of Audience Reaction to Jack Rosenthal's Bar Mitzvah Boy and Eskimo Day, *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, (8)2, 272-282.

<sup>130</sup> Itzin, C. (1980) *Stages in the Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain Since 1968*. London: Eyre Methuen, 364-389.

<sup>131</sup> Poole, M. & Wyver, J. (1984) *Powerplays: Trevor Griffiths in Television*. London: BFI Publishing; Tulloch op. cit.; Tulloch, J. (2006) *The Television Series: Trevor Griffiths*. Manchester: Manchester University Press; Garner Jr., S.B. (1999) *Trevor Griffiths: Politics, Drama, History*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press; Panos, L. (2010) Realism and Politics in Alienated Space: Trevor Griffiths's Plays of the 1970s in the Television Studio, *New Theatre Quarterly*, (26)3, 273-286; Panos, L. (2013) Trevor Griffiths' Absolute Beginners: Socialist Humanism and the Television Studio, *Journal of British Cinema and Television* (10)1, 151-170.

Fuller and Ian Greaves, David Rolinson and John Williams's collection of Potter's non-fiction.<sup>132</sup>

Few directors have received comparable auteur-like studies, though David Rolinson has analysed Alan Clarke and his delineation of authoritarian institutional spaces, Susan Willis has appraised Jane Howell as an artist with a theatrical stylisation, while John Caughie evaluates writer-director David Hare's *Dreams of Leaving* (1980) as 'serious drama' akin to European art cinema.<sup>133</sup> Analyses of Ken Loach's work include those by Jacob Leigh, Anthony Hayward and John Hill, an edited collection by George McKnight and Fuller's collected interviews.<sup>134</sup> There are studies of Mike Leigh by Paul Clements, Michael Coveney, Edward Trostle Jones, Garry Watson and Tony Whitehead; Howie Movshovitz's and Amy Raphael's interview collections and Carney and Quart's and Cardinale-Powell and DiPaolo's edited essay collections.<sup>135</sup>

Less attention has been paid to managers or producers: Stephen Lacey's book-length study of Tony Garnett is a rare exception.<sup>136</sup> However, passages from David Self and John Cook, memoirs by Shaun Sutton, Irene Shubik and Tony Garnett and interviews collected in edited volumes by Bakewell and Garnham and Bignell and Lacey are rich resources of writers', actors', producers' and managers' experiences and insights.<sup>137</sup> See Appendix 4 for an account of how PFT's producers shaped the strand's shifting identity over time.

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<sup>132</sup> Cook, J.R. (1994) *Follow the Yellow Brick Road: A Study of the Work of Dennis Potter*. University of Glasgow [unpublished Ph.D. thesis]; Cook, J.R. (1995) op. cit.; Gilbert, W.S. (1995) *Fight and Kick and Bite: The Life and Work of Dennis Potter*. London: Spectre; Carpenter, H. (1998) *Dennis Potter: A Biography*. London: Faber and Faber; Creeber, G. (1998) op. cit.; Fuller, G. (ed.) (1993) op. cit.; Greaves, I., Rolinson, D. & Williams, J. (eds.) (2015) *The Art of Invective: Selected Non-Fiction, 1953-94*. London: Oberon.

<sup>133</sup> Rolinson, D. (2004) *Authorship, form and narrative in the television plays of Alan Clarke, 1967-89*. University of Hull [unpublished Ph.D. thesis]; Rolinson, D. (2005) *The Television Series: Alan Clarke*. Manchester: Manchester University Press; Willis, S. (1991) *The BBC Shakespeare Plays: Making the Televised Canon*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 165-186; Caughie (2000) op. cit.

<sup>134</sup> Leigh, J. (2002) *the cinema of Ken Loach: art in the service of the people*. London: Wallflower Press; Hayward, A. (2005) *Which Side Are You On? Ken Loach and his films*. London: Bloomsbury; Hill (2011) op. cit.; McKnight, G. (ed.) (1997) *Agent of Challenge and Defiance: The Films of Ken Loach*. Trowbridge, Wilts: Flicks Books; Fuller (ed.) (1998) op. cit.

<sup>135</sup> Clements, P. (1983) *The Improvised Play: The Work of Mike Leigh*. London: Methuen; Coveney (1997) op. cit.; Trostle Jones, E. (2004) *All or Nothing: the Cinema of Mike Leigh*. Bern: Peter Lang Copyright AG; Watson, G. (2004) *The Cinema of Mike Leigh: a sense of the real*. London: Wallflower Press; Whitehead, T. (2007) *British Film Makers: Mike Leigh*. Manchester: Manchester University Press; Movshovitz, H. (ed.) (2000) *Mike Leigh Interviews*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi; Raphael, A. (ed.) (2008) *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh*. London: Faber and Faber; Carney, R. & Quart, L. (eds.) (2000) *The films of Mike Leigh: embracing the world*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Cardinale-Powell, B. & DiPaolo, M. (eds.) (2013) *Devised and Directed by Mike Leigh*. London: Bloomsbury.

<sup>136</sup> Lacey, S. (2007) *The Television Series: Tony Garnett*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

<sup>137</sup> Self, D. (1984) *Television Drama: An Introduction*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 62-84; Cook (2004) op. cit. 2512; Sutton, S. (1982) *The Largest Theatre in the World: Thirty Years of Television Drama*. London: BBC Books; Shubik, I. (2000) *Play for Today: The evolution of television drama*, 2nd edn. Manchester: Manchester University Press; Garnett (2016) op. cit.; Bakewell & Garnham (1970) op. cit.; Bignell, J. &

*Cathy*, *Abigail's Party*, and *Blue Remembered Hills* are canonical texts which function as metonyms of the TWP and PFT strands in public memory. In parallel, as previously established, Mike Leigh, Ken Loach and Dennis Potter have had significantly the most words published about them of any PFT creative figures. It is worth exploring several significant links and critical disputes between and concerning these three. Leigh claims that the 'most vitriolic' critic of his work was Dennis Potter, who insisted that Leigh's *Abigail's Party* was 'based on nothing more edifying than rancid disdain, for it was a prolonged jeer, twitching with genuine hatred, about the dreadful suburban tastes of the dreadful lower-middle classes'.<sup>138</sup> Contrastingly, Marc DiPaolo perceives Leigh's work as a rare 'unashamedly human' filmmaker rather than a heartlessly snarky caricaturist.<sup>139</sup> Leigh impacted on Potter in 1984 when Kenith Trodd was removed as co-producer of Potter's feature-film *Dreamchild* (1985) due to what Potter perceived as his neglect of the project in favour of Leigh's *Four Days in July* (1985).<sup>140</sup>

Robert Murphy brackets Leigh and Loach together as 'great talents and great survivors' of British cinema and TV; Tim Robey and Michael Eaton link them more bluntly, in form and content.<sup>141</sup> Leonard Quart distinguishes Leigh from Loach as the former's work is 'too ambiguous, too rife with contradiction to offer political alternatives or answers', while the latter offers 'ringing political or social solutions'.<sup>142</sup> Quart characterises Loach's *Cathy* as socio-political, whereas Leigh's *Naked* (1993) is 'existential'.<sup>143</sup> Leigh thinks that Loach would regard him politically as 'a lily-livered liberal. And quite rightly so.'<sup>144</sup> He implicitly approves of Loach's role in broadening British screen representations while praising Stephen Frears most highly as a 'brilliant [...] eclectic director'.<sup>145</sup>

Many writers have linked Loach and Dennis Potter as grammar-school scholarship boys who were contemporaries at Oxford University.<sup>146</sup> Jacob Leigh sees Loach's work as fulfilling Sydney Newman's Griersonian call for 'Art in the service of the people', while

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Lacey, S. (eds.) (2014) *British Television Drama: Past, Present and Future*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>138</sup> Leigh interviewed by Kenneth Turan in: Movshovitz op. cit. 87. Potter gave double-edged praise to Alison Steadman's 'memorably nasty' performance: Greaves, Rolinson & Williams op. cit. 229-230.

<sup>139</sup> DiPaolo in: Cardinale-Powell & DiPaolo op. cit. 5-6.

<sup>140</sup> Carpenter op. cit. 432.

<sup>141</sup> Murphy quoted in Whitehead op. cit. 2; Hill, J. (1997) Finding a form: politics and aesthetics in *Fatherland*, *Hidden Agenda* and *Riff-Raff*, in: G. McKnight (ed.) *Agent of Challenge and Defiance*, op. cit. 138.

<sup>142</sup> Quart, L. (1999/2000) The Uniqueness of Ordinary Lives: Mike Leigh's BBC Films, *Film Criticism*, (24)2, 51; Quart, L. (2013) The Uniqueness of Ordinary Lives: *Home Sweet Home* and *Grown-Ups*, in: Cardinale-Powell & DiPaolo op. cit. 129.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Interview with Turan in: Movshovitz op. cit. 75.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Creeber (1998) op. cit. 31; Caughie (2000) op. cit. 61-62; Leigh op. cit. 178; Hill (2011) op. cit. 5.

John Williams, comparably, sees Potter's designing of his televised dramas to be part of what Raymond Williams saw as a 'common culture', breaking through hierarchies of the printed word and class to reach large audiences.<sup>147</sup> Jacob Leigh has noted their different aesthetic choices and how Loach loved Potter's Nigel Barton plays, but found his 'theatre of self-revelation' less interesting.<sup>148</sup> What John Cook perceives as Potter's post-1971 shift from public to private dramas was regarded by Kenith Trodd as 'a sort of revolt against Loachery and filming on the streets'.<sup>149</sup>

As a critic, Potter's attitudes to Loach's work thawed. In 1966, Potter sneered at Garnett's filmed location approach.<sup>150</sup> However, as Julian Petley notes, Potter passionately defended David Mercer's Laingian *In Two Minds* (1967), directed by Loach, as a necessarily partial WP which 'must have left a hubbub of doubts and questions boiling in a million homes'.<sup>151</sup> By 1977, he echoed Raymond Williams in praising the Loach-Garnett-Allen school's progressive realism and 'the rigour, clarity, originality and depth of their perception of a more comprehensive reality'.<sup>152</sup> In the 1980s, Loach's shift to documentaries lacked the impact of the social realist TV fictions he had made with Garnett, which, in Deborah Knight's terms possessed a 'critical realism' in the lineage of Émile Zola.<sup>153</sup>

A key figure linking Loach and Potter was producer Kenith Trodd, who deliberately decided to keep in with both camps.<sup>154</sup> Potter was not quite part of the New Left circle; while admiring some of their ideas and their clear anti-Stalinism, he felt they were still ideologically too rigid.<sup>155</sup> He loathed left-wing dramatists Howard Brenton, Trevor Griffiths and Barrie Keeffe, characterising them as 'New Reactionaries', whose alarmist imaginings refused to 'look at what is capable of repair in the road directly in front of them'.<sup>156</sup> Here, ironically, Potter resembles the reformism of Edward Waite (Bill Fraser) in Griffiths's *All Good Men* (1974), an impression corroborated by Potter's Royalism and loyalty to the Labour Party.<sup>157</sup> Despite his antipathy to Brechtian drama, which he saw as preaching to the converted and unable to reach or sway others, Potter praised his fellow

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<sup>147</sup> Leigh *ibid*; Greaves, Rolinson & Williams *op. cit.* 7.

<sup>148</sup> Leigh *ibid*.

<sup>149</sup> Cook (1995) *op. cit.* 148-149; Gilbert *op. cit.* 194.

<sup>150</sup> Potter, D. (1966) Cue telecine – put on the kettle, *New Society*, 22 Sep, 456-457.

<sup>151</sup> Petley, J. (1997) Factual fictions and fictional fallacies: Ken Loach's documentary dramas, in McKnight *op. cit.* 33; Potter, D. (1967) Sting in the Brain, *New Statesman*, 10 Mar, 338-339.

<sup>152</sup> Greaves, Rolinson & Williams *op. cit.* 212.

<sup>153</sup> Fuller (1998) *op. cit.* 63; Knight, D. (1997) Naturalism, narration and critical perspective: Ken Loach and the experimental method, in: McKnight *op. cit.* 68-71.

<sup>154</sup> Carpenter *op. cit.* 179.

<sup>155</sup> Fuller (1998) *op. cit.* 13.

<sup>156</sup> Greaves, Rolinson & Williams *op. cit.* 200.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.* 195-198; Carpenter *op. cit.* 217.

modernist John McGrath's work for being more hopeful and enabling audiences 'to make connections'.<sup>158</sup> Loach later worked with Trevor Griffiths though he perceives their film *Fatherland* (1986) as unsuccessful and Griffiths as overly 'literary' compared with his preferred writer collaborators.<sup>159</sup>

PfT writer Hugh Whitmore argues that the TV drama adapter of literary works is undervalued, comparing them to plumbers or electricians. Echoing Bourdieusian sociological analysis, Whitmore discerns the 'rigid structure of class distinction' within TV drama's 'tiny, enclosed world':

At the top are those aristocrats of the single-play, then come those who work on prestige serials, followed by the manufacturers of popular series, with soap opera labourers languishing at the bottom.<sup>160</sup>

Demonstrating Whitmore's point, David Self places the single-play first in his analytical account of all TV drama genres: ahead of theatre-plays, drama documentaries, series and serials, classic adapted serials and soap opera.<sup>161</sup> Since the connoisseur-like selections of Whitmore, Self and Brandt, the single-play has become less central within TV drama.

Many reject a straightforward binary between the serious and popular. Martin Esslin argued for the cultural potency of series dramas, which contain 'new heroes of folk myth', whose familiarity instils audience loyalty.<sup>162</sup> Tulloch specifically rebukes Self's hierarchy of drama forms and Brandt's 'conservative, patriarchal and 'high-cultural' canon'.<sup>163</sup>

Socio-historical and textual attention to gender in TV drama includes pioneering analyses of soap opera by Helen Baehr, Charlotte Brunson, Christine Geraghty, Marion Jordan and Dorothy Hobson, while Lez Cooke emphasises the increased agency of women characters in popular series dramas *The Gentle Touch* (1980-84), *Juliet Bravo* (1980-85), *Widows* (1983-85) and *C.A.T.S. Eyes* (1985-87) and Lynda La Plante's innovative crime drama authorship (see Chapter 5 for more detailed analysis of gender in PfT).<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Cook (1995) op. cit. 293; Greaves, Rolinson & Williams *ibid.* 200.

<sup>159</sup> Fuller (1998) op. cit. 60.

<sup>160</sup> Whitmore, H. (1982) *Word into Image: Reflections on Television Dramatization*, in: F. Pike (ed.) *Ah! Mischief: The Writer and Television*. London: Faber and Faber, 101.

<sup>161</sup> Self op. cit. 1-2.

<sup>162</sup> Esslin, M. (1978) *An Anatomy of Drama*. London: Abacus, 83.

<sup>163</sup> Tulloch (1990) op. cit. 3.

<sup>164</sup> Baehr, H. (1980) The 'Liberated Woman' in Television Drama, *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, 3, 29-39; Brunson, C. (1981) 'Crossroads' Notes on Soap Opera, *Screen*, (22)4, Winter, 33-37; Geraghty, C. (1981) The Continuous Serial – a Definition & Jordan, M. (1981) Character Types and the Individual, both in: R. Dyer et al. *Coronation Street*. London: British Film Institute, 9-26, 67-80; Hobson, D. (1982) *Crossroads: The Drama of a Soap Opera*. London: Methuen; Cooke, L. (2015) *British Television Drama: A History*, 2nd edn. London: British Film Institute, 159-163.

As 1.7 will explore, critics have gradually canonised fewer single-plays, matching the form's historical decline in output: Barnett and Seymour detail how the total of one-off dramas in the schedules halved from 1977-78 to 1997-98.<sup>165</sup> The sense of decline was expressed earlier in a *South Bank Show* discussion on 'The Rise and Fall of the Single-play' (1979), while, in 1980, Gardner and Wyver and W. Stephen Gilbert all presciently argued that the single-play was struggling due to economic factors and was now largely restricted to the BBC.<sup>166</sup> Indeed, ITV's flagship single-play strand Armchair Theatre, which fostered the spin-off Armchair Mystery Theatre (1960-65), was revived in more cinematic and 'genre' modes as Armchair Cinema (1974-80) and Armchair Thriller (1978-81), respectively. ITV companies like Yorkshire Television and Granada continued single-play strands into the mid-1980s, but these were short-lived.

Peter Ansorge and Lez Cooke see serial drama as continuing the socially-committed single-play ethos, though Brandt saw this more terminally as a last-gasp. Ansorge describes Alan Bleasdale as a 'pioneer of the television novel', comparing *Boys from the Blackstuff* (1982), *GBH* (1991) and *Jake's Progress* (1995) with David Hare's theatre plays as humanist dramas which challenge left-wing orthodoxy.<sup>167</sup> Cooke extolls Troy Kennedy Martin's *Edge of Darkness* (1985) as a novelistic, politically complex serial whose provincial detective narrative widens to incorporate themes of environmentalism and nuclear disarmament.<sup>168</sup>

Glen Creeber's edited *Television Genre Book*, now in its third edition, reflects the shifting valuations of drama forms, away from the single-play, and towards currently popular genres.<sup>169</sup> Its first two editions in 2001 and 2008 each included a section on the single-play, but this was omitted from the most recent 2015 edition. In 2001, nine of 140 pages were devoted to the single-play and drama-documentary – including a case-study of *Cathy*. The second edition granted the single-play and drama-documentary nine out of 181 pages, with new chapters added on Reality TV and animation. In the third edition, this was down to three out of 215 pages, with just the drama-documentary section retained; there were new sections on tele-fantasy and the police-procedural, while the comedy and popular

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<sup>165</sup> Barnett & Seymour op. cit. 44.

<sup>166</sup> Gardner and Wyver's paper, delivered at the 1980 Edinburgh International Television Festival was published as: Gardner & Wyver (1983) op. cit.; Gilbert, W.S. (1980) The Television Play: Outside the Consensus, *Screen Education*, 35, Summer, 35-44. .

<sup>167</sup> Ansorge (1997) op. cit.

<sup>168</sup> Cooke (2015) op. cit. 152-158.

<sup>169</sup> Creeber, G. (ed.) (2001) op. cit.; Creeber, G. (ed.) (2008) *The Television Genre Book*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London: BFI; Creeber, G. (ed.) (2015) op. cit.

entertainment chapters were expanded. Previous editions' case-study of TWP and PFT were now excised, despite the multiplicity of dramatic genres they encompassed.

Cooke linked the single-play's decline to 'seismic' ideological changes in Britain which impacted on the BBC, while Ansorge bemoaned TV's current populist 'ratings war', where audiences of 10 million were needed to be deemed a successful drama: 'If it isn't a cop show, medical drama or classic adaptation, it simply won't be produced'.<sup>170</sup> He sees the single-play tradition as a victim of John Birt's centralisation of management power. However, the single-play tradition persists in reduced scope via the anthologies *Inside No. 9* (2014- ) and *Black Mirror* (2011- ), while David Rolinson identifies seven recent one-off TV docudramas as being in the PFT tradition, while arguing that the 'socially urgent, formally experimental, ground-breaking' likes of debbie tucker green's TV film-play *random* (2011) and Michaela Coel's serial *I May Destroy You* (2020) embody the potential for a contemporary PFT.<sup>171</sup>

John Ellis defines the two methodologies for analysing archival TV texts as *textual historical* and *immanent*.<sup>172</sup> The former 'hermeneutic' approach analyses the text with foremost attention to its social and historical context; the latter is a freer critical decoding by the reader today. Using Alun Owen's social realist Armchair Theatre play *Lena, O My Lena* (1960), Ellis argues for the importance of understanding its era's social class attitudes, the tripartite education system and stark gender divides in working-class communities, alongside contextually analysing its 'moment of broadcast'.<sup>173</sup> This thesis will expand the range of PFT's producers, directors, writers and actors whose work is analysed, while situating this work in its institutional context. David McQueen, in his study of a similarly totemic BBC 'brand', the documentary *Panorama* (1953- ), identifies a lack of focus on its 'unexceptional programmes', in contrast to those which elicited controversies.<sup>174</sup> Chapters 2, 4 and 5 include detailed textual analysis of a range of mostly neglected PFTs, using *textual historical* and *immanent* approaches.

## **1.7. Play for Today and televisual canons**

Jonathan Bignell claims canons are unavoidable in television studies, defining them as 'a privileged selection from a broader field, which will be subsequently reconfirmed,

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<sup>170</sup> Cooke, L. (2015) op. cit. 139; Ansorge (1997) op. cit. 137.

<sup>171</sup> Rolinson (2020) op. cit.

<sup>172</sup> Ellis, J. (2007) Is it possible to construct a canon of television programmes? Immanent reading versus textual-historicism, in: Wheatley (ed.) op. cit. 25-26.

<sup>173</sup> Ellis *ibid*.

<sup>174</sup> McQueen, D. (2010) *BBC TV's Panorama, conflict coverage and the 'Westminster consensus'*, Bournemouth University [unpublished Ph.D. thesis].

contested or replaced by others over time.<sup>175</sup> BBC historian Asa Briggs includes two PFTs in his ‘Chronology’ of significant BBC programmes made in 1955-74: Jeremy Sandford’s *Edna, the Inebriate Woman* (1971) and Colin Welland’s *Leeds United!* alongside TWPs *Up the Junction* (1965) (*UTJ*) and *Cathy*.<sup>176</sup> Caughie has analysed the former as a central ‘Golden Age’ modernist drama ‘interested in a social and historical environment’.<sup>177</sup> BBC and Channel 4 manager Janice Hadlow argues that *Cathy* and Peter Watkins’s docudrama *Culloden* (1964) rectified representational gaps: *Cathy* ‘opened up the lives of the working class and still stands up today’, while *Culloden* was an E.P. Thompson-inspired, bottom-up returning of history to ‘ordinary people’.<sup>178</sup> In addition to *UTJ* and *Cathy*, Creeber highlights Dennis Potter’s *Stand Up, Nigel Barton* and *Vote, Vote, Vote for Nigel Barton* (both 1965) and David Mercer’s *And Did Those Feet?* (1965).<sup>179</sup> Creeber claims that PFT continued TWP’s radical remit, emphasising its eclecticism through his exemplars: Jim Allen’s ‘politically committed’ *The Rank and File* (1971), Potter’s ‘award winning’ and ‘provocative’ *Blue Remembered Hills* (1979) and Jack Rosenthal and Mike Leigh’s comedies *Bar Mitzvah Boy* (1976) and *Abigail’s Party*.<sup>180</sup>

In his historiographic account of TV drama, Bignell follows the Brandt authorship model in not mentioning any specific PFTs, but foregrounding the writers Mercer, Griffiths and Sandford; elsewhere, he describes *Cathy* as the most canonical TV drama text, and ‘compulsory’ for students of television to study as the ‘most repeated single-play in British television history and therefore the most accessible, and it is regarded both inside and outside academia as formally and politically significant’.<sup>181</sup> Bignell discusses his and Stephen Lacey’s focus on institutional working cultures beyond just the BBC as a process of canon expansion and refraction, crediting Helen Wheatley’s enlightening elucidation of how Armchair Theatre, beyond the canonised social realism that *Lena, O My Lena* exemplifies, used popular forms such as thrillers, mysteries and comedies.<sup>182</sup>

In 2000, 72% of the programmes in BFI’s poll of best TV programmes were BBC-made. 46 were dramas, with five selected in the top ten, showing drama’s privileged status within the field. Of 16 one-off dramas, five were PFTs: *Abigail’s Party* (#11), *Blue Remembered*

<sup>175</sup> Bignell, J. (2007) op. cit. 28.

<sup>176</sup> Briggs op. cit. 1041-1075.

<sup>177</sup> Caughie (2000) op. cit. 109-124, 199.

<sup>178</sup> Anon (2004) op. cit. 21.

<sup>179</sup> Creeber, G. (ed.) (2004). *Fifty Key Television Programmes*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 40-44, 65-69; Creeber (2001) op. cit. 13.

<sup>180</sup> Creeber (2001) *ibid*.

<sup>181</sup> Bignell (2007) op. cit.; Bignell, J. (2005) Exemplarity, Pedagogy and Television History, *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, (3)1, 28. Bignell’s claim was true when made, but *Abigail’s Party* has, as of June 2022, received 12 repeats to *Cathy*’s 11.

<sup>182</sup> Bignell (2007) *ibid*. 36-38.

*Hills* (#36), *Nuts in May* (#49), *Bar Mitzvah Boy* (#56) and *Edna, the Inebriate Woman* (#57).<sup>183</sup> *The War Game* – originally produced for TWP – was #27 and *Cathy* was #2, just ahead of *Doctor Who* (1963-89) and behind *Fawlty Towers* (1975-79). This shows TWP and PFT's pre-eminent status according to industry elites and how they function as the metonym for the one-off single-play.

Even the popular historian and *Daily Mail* propagandist Dominic Sandbrook joins in the canonising of 'extremely good' PFTs like *Abigail's Party* and *Comedians* and enthuses over a 'lovely scene' in Peter Nichols's *Hearts and Flowers* (1970), which counters its era's mania for change similarly to PFT writer Jeremy Seabrook's pessimistic journalistic accounts of increasingly post-industrial, working-class Blackburn.<sup>184</sup> In a patriotic flourish, Sandbrook claims that, 'in Dennis Potter Britain boasted probably the greatest television playwright in the world'; whose work, as Creeber argues, was uniquely fostered by TWP and PFT.<sup>185</sup> *Radio Times* journalist Alison Graham's list included just two single-plays: one was *Abigail's Party*, previously selected by the BFI and, subsequently, in 2016 and 2018 by the *Telegraph*, making it the most critically canonised PFT of the past two decades.<sup>186</sup>

From 2000-18, lists of top TV programmes by the BFI (2000), *Radio Times* (2003), *Broadcast* (2004), Creeber (2004), the *Guardian* (2010) and the *Telegraph* (2018) all included socially engaged, political or experimental drama serials from writers from the single-play tradition: Bleasdale's *Boys from the Blackstuff* and Potter's *The Singing Detective* (1986) appeared in all lists, *Edge of Darkness* in the first three. The BFI included several plays or serials written by PFT writers John Hopkins, Jack Rosenthal, David Leland, Alan Bennett and Alan Plater: *Talking to a Stranger* (1966), *The Knowledge* (1979), *Made in Britain* (1983), *An Englishman Abroad* (1983), and *A Very British Coup* (1988). Grace Dent wittily juxtaposed this drama legacy against current lifestyle or safer drama output, arguing that BBC4 and UK Gold should be repeating 1980s-90s dramas by

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<sup>183</sup> Wells (2000) op. cit.

<sup>184</sup> Sandbrook (2011) op. cit. 25, 48-49; Sandbrook (2012) op. cit. 21.

<sup>185</sup> Sandbrook (2011) ibid. 48; Creeber (2001) op. cit. 13.

<sup>186</sup> Graham list in: Timms, D. (2003) Top 40 TV greats unveiled, *Guardian*, 27 Aug [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2003/aug/27/broadcasting.bbc2> [accessed: 16/08/2022]; Tate, G., Lawrence, B., Hogan, M., O'Donovan, G. & Gee, C. (2016) The best BBC shows of all time, *Daily Telegraph*, 2 Nov [online] Available via LexisNexis Academic: <https://advance.lexis.com/bisnexishome/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=1018bacc-0536-4018-87df-b2baf0600873> [accessed: 01/08/2022]; Tate, G., Lawrence, B., Hogan, M., O'Donovan, G. & Gee, C. (2018) The Greatest British TV shows of all time, *Daily Telegraph*, 22 Jun [online] Available via LexisNexis Academic: <https://advance.lexis.com/bisnexishome/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=1018bacc-0536-4018-87df-b2baf0600873> [accessed: 01/08/2022].

Bennett, Bleasdale, Davies and Potter, but ‘instead they’re playing *Coast* [2005-16] 24 hours a day and bloody *Silent Witness* [1996- ]’.<sup>187</sup>

Industry magazine *Broadcast* includes topical, societal engaged TV drama, alongside middlebrow heritage dramas and popular soap operas: marvelling, in economic and empiricist terms, at the ‘worldwide sales’ of *The Forsyte Saga* (1967), the cost of making *Brideshead Revisited* (1981) and stressing the longevity of *Coronation Street* (1960- ) ‘at the top of the ratings pile’.<sup>188</sup> In contrast to eight dramas, *Broadcast* selected 20 in the ‘entertainment’ programmes, demonstrating its populist orientation; also discernible in its own increased coverage of ratings in the 1980s and since. Indeed, they select lifestyle show *Changing Rooms* (1996-2004), citing its ‘46% market-share’, and *Big Brother* (2000-18) is ahead of PFT, explicitly due to its perceived status as more influential today.<sup>189</sup>

The broadsheet press’s recent canon formation reflects temporal shifts, as the ‘Golden Age’ recedes further from critics’ living viewing memories. The *Guardian*’s poll had *The Sopranos* (1999-2007) at the summit, followed by *Brideshead Revisited* and the increasingly canonical *Our Friends in the North* (1996).<sup>190</sup> Only five of the 50 dramas are pre-1980, with espionage adaptation serial *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (1979) the highest pre-1980s programme (#21). The *Telegraph*’s TV critics’ Top 80 BBC programmes list included a greater historical sweep: placing PFT at #17 and TWP at #5.<sup>191</sup> They describe the TV play’s demise as ‘tragic’, as it had ‘pricked the nation’s social conscience’; alongside *Cathy*, they mention John Hopkins’s anti-Apartheid *Fable* (1965) and David Mercer’s R.D. Laing-inspired *In Two Minds* (1967).<sup>192</sup> For these critics, PFT ‘maintained that strand’s variety, authority and commitment to social commentary’, while ‘revelling’ in the ‘elasticity of genre’ (see Chapter 2 for an account of this).<sup>193</sup> They acclaimed the strand’s key role in nurturing writers and directors like Leigh, Bleasdale and Clarke.<sup>194</sup>

In 2018, *Telegraph* critics published a ‘Greatest’ 100 British TV shows list. Drama was again well represented: 46 were selected, including 4 single-plays or associated strands, plus works by PFT writers Bradbury and Bennett. PFT is included and lauded as a ‘high-quality [...] treasure trove’, which involved exceptional authorial talent: Potter (*Brimstone*

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<sup>187</sup> Lusher, T. (2010) The Guardian’s top 50 television dramas of all time, *Guardian*, 12 Jan [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/tvandradioblog/2010/jan/12/guardian-50-television-dramas> [accessed: 09/11/2018].

<sup>188</sup> Anon (2004) op. cit. 18

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Lusher op. cit.

<sup>191</sup> Tate, Lawrence, Hogan, O’Donovan & Gee (2016) op. cit.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

and *Treacle*), Bennett (*Sunset Across the Bay*), Bergman (*The Lie*) and Leigh (*Nuts in May*).<sup>195</sup> Notably, challenging dramas by Garnett, Allen and Welland like *Leeds United!*, *Days of Hope* and *The Spongers* have never appeared in these lists. While PFT and *Cathy* both live in cultural and critical memory, the press neglects or traduces PFT's most ideologically challenging works. Journalistic elites prefer to venerate authors like Bennett, Bleasdale, Leigh, Potter and Rosenthal ahead of the directly political writers like Allen, Edgar, Griffiths, McGrath, Ové and Reckord.<sup>196</sup>

PFT's own first specific unofficial canon was produced in 2022, consisting of the votes of 20 academics, postgraduates and TV practitioners.<sup>197</sup> This showed a clear preference for filmed productions: only two of the top 11 have video sequences. The joint top three – *Penda's Fen* (1974), *Gangsters* (1975) and *Nuts in May* (1976) – were all Pebble Mill productions, while also being from the era of PFT's most famous title sequence with Carl Davis's musical ident (1973-76). Like some of the *Telegraph* journalists, Phil Norman includes in his televisual history a refreshingly unusual selection of PFTs: Clive Exton's *The Largest Theatre in the World: The Rainbirds* (1971) and Potter's *Double Dare* (1976). While quoting the predominantly hostile critical reaction to *The Rainbirds*, Norman approves its risk-taking and flawed experimentalism as an implicit exemplar of British TV drama when the aforementioned 'right to fail' was a valued maxim.<sup>198</sup>

63 PFTs have been published, 21.4% of the total made.<sup>199</sup> This includes 47.6% of series 9 (1978-79), when publisher Methuen published all nine from Autumn 1978 near to their broadcast dates; however, this was a short-lived venture. The only PFT that has been subject to book-length study is David Rudkin's formally and intellectually radical *Penda's Fen* (1974): Sukhdev Sandhu and Harle and Machin's edited volume have dissected Rudkin's filmed drama, which gained a 'cult' following after its 1990 repeat screening as a 'Film 4 Today'.<sup>200</sup> *Abigail's Party* has been culturally recirculated the most of any PFT via repeats – including themed evenings on BBC2 in 1997 and BBC4 in 2007 – and has been

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<sup>195</sup> Tate, Lawrence, Hogan, O'Donovan & Gee (2018) op. cit.

<sup>196</sup> However, this canonising reflects the reality that PFT's less *overtly* political writers *were* more typical of the strand. See Appendix 5 for an analysis of which authors have been canonised via numbers of repeats and physical media releases.

<sup>197</sup> Hill, J. with May, T. (2022) Play for Today: The Top 21, **Forgotten Television Drama**, 4 May [online] Available at: <https://forgottentelevisiondrama.wordpress.com/2022/05/04/play-for-today-the-top-21/> [accessed: 01/08/2022].

<sup>198</sup> Norman, P. (2015) *A History of Television in 100 Programmes*. London: The Friday Project (HarperCollins), 151-155.

<sup>199</sup> Several of these are original texts of stage plays adapted later as PFTs, e.g. McGrath's *The Cheviot, The Stag and The Black, Black Oil* and Edgar's *Destiny*; these were much altered for TV, especially the former.

<sup>200</sup> Sandhu, S.S. (2014). *The Edge is Where the Centre Is: David Rudkin and Pendas Fen: A Conversation*. London: Texte und Tone; Harle, M. & Machin, J. (eds.) (2019). *Of Mud and Flame: A Penda's Fen sourcebook*. London: Strange Attractor Press.

analysed in articles by Mikita Brottman, whose analogy of the narcissistic Beverly with emergent Thatcherism is somewhat strained, and Ruth Adams, who persuasively claims its kitsch appeal is not snide, being from ‘a more genuine and generous nostalgic urge’.<sup>201</sup> Simon Farquhar has provided a rare longitudinal study of PFT, with his detailed account of its first series (1970-71), whose centrepiece is an extensive production history and analysis of W. Stephen Gilbert’s *Circle Line* (1971).<sup>202</sup> See Appendix 5 for a thorough analysis of canon construction in terms of which PFTs have been repeated most on TV and released on physical media.

Inextricably linked with ‘canonisation’ are issues of access and availability. In 2016, John Wyver called for pre-digital TV programmes to be made more widely obtainable, being far from a ‘niche’ interest:

Collectively it is one vital component of our shared social, cultural and political histories and a key element in the composition of our individual and collective identities.<sup>203</sup>

Works by ‘auteur’ figures have been released in DVD or BluRay box-sets: Peter McDougall (2007), Mike Leigh (2009), Alan Bennett (2010), Jack Rosenthal (2011), Ken Loach (2011) and Alan Clarke (2016); alongside three BluRay box-sets dedicated to PFT (2020-22). 44 PFTs were released via BBC-Store, until its November 2017 closure, and 23 of these are now available via Amazon Prime Video. 31 are currently available to BritBox subscribers in the US.<sup>204</sup> As of 2018, 80 PFTs, plus the unofficial *Stan’s Last Game* (1983), were freely available for members of the public to watch at the BFI’s six Mediatheques – in Southbank London, Birmingham, Glasgow, Bradford, Manchester and Wrexham.<sup>205</sup> In 2020, the BFI’s senior TV curator Lisa Kerrigan claimed that ‘around 130’ PFTs were now available to watch via Mediatheques, though these do not yet seem to be within a curated collection.<sup>206</sup> This author has assisted in efforts to make the PFT archive more widely available via Learning on Screen’s Box of Broadcasts. Access to this extensive resource was previously only for card-holders at FE and HE institutions; however, the BBC has

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<sup>201</sup> Brottman, M. (2007) Debauchery next door: The Boundaries of Shame in Abigail’s Party, *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, (24)4, 317-323; Adams, R. (2022) *Abigail’s Party*: ‘It’s not a question of ignorance, Laurence, it’s a question of taste’, in: Wrigley & Wyver (eds.) *Screen Plays*, op. cit. 222.

<sup>202</sup> Farquhar, S. (2021a) *Play for Today: The First Year*. Self-published: Lulu, 77-113.

<sup>203</sup> Wyver quoted in: Smart, B. & Wrigley, A. (2016) Television history: archives, excavation and the future. A discussion, *Critical Studies in Television*, (11)1, 108.

<sup>204</sup> Thanks to Ian Pointer for this information.

<sup>205</sup> Newcastle upon Tyne’s BFI Mediatheque at the Discovery Museum was closed in 2018, as revealed to me in an email from a member of staff at the Museum (04/04/2018).

<sup>206</sup> BFI (2020) *Play for Today at 50*; BFI (2022a) **BFI Archive Collections** [online] Available at: <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/archive-collections/introduction-bfi-collections/bfi-mediatheques/curated-collections> [accessed: 17/06/2022].

enabled schoolteachers at institutions with an ERA licence and which subscribe to BoB, Planet E-Stream or Clickview to access its vast archival holdings.<sup>207</sup>

## **1.8. Play for Today and identity**

While Deborah Orr and Nicholas Mirzoeff describe PFT as part of a ‘golden age’ and lament its absence, they criticise it on liberal identity-politics grounds for its creative personnel being too male and white.<sup>208</sup> Billy Smart and PFT writer Jehane Markham countered this reductive view, clarifying that the strand did *not* totally exclude women contributors.<sup>209</sup> Orr’s and Mirzoeff’s mythmaking ironically strengthens Smart’s argument that ‘women’s contributions to British television drama have been comparatively neglected and forgotten in cultural history’.<sup>210</sup> The proportion of PFTs directed by women is fractionally higher than the 3.05% of British films from 1970-84 that were female-directed.<sup>211</sup> PFT employed almost 3% more women writers, and, notably, 15% more women producers. Chapter 5 will provide detailed analysis of how well PFT represented ethnicity, sexuality, gender and class, while Appendix 8 shares oral histories of nine women who worked on PFT.

## **1.9. Conclusion**

PFT, and its predecessor TWP, emerged in a context of greater cultural democratisation, a process that Raymond Williams and Lawrence Alloway endorsed. Sydney Newman played a key role in establishing, through TWP, more pluralistic drama output that included working-class voices; producer Tony Garnett was a highly significant example, bringing a politicised working-class-centric drama which was part of how the BBC refreshed its image in its Greene era. While this ‘social’ tradition is important, producers Peter Luke and Irene Shubik’s more literary strain of WPs and PFTs has been overlooked, somewhat, perhaps due to its more elitist connotations in comparison to the Loach-Garnett-Allen approach. Both PFT’s social and literary traditions offered human-centric drama that possessed a variety entirely unlike ongoing series which relied on recurring settings and

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<sup>207</sup> Thanks to Marianne Open of Learning on Screen for this information (Email, 20/06/2022).

<sup>208</sup> Orr op. cit.; Mirzoeff, N. (2016) On the new British ‘popular’, in: N. Seth-Smith, J. Mackay & D. Hind (eds.) *Rethinking the BBC: Public Media in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* [report]. Margate: Commonwealth, 20. Mirzoeff admits doing this purely on the strength of reading PFT’s Wikipedia page!

<sup>209</sup> Smart, B. & Markham, J. (2017) Women who worked on Play for Today, *Guardian*, 15 Jan [online] Available via LexisNexis Academic:

<https://advance.lexis.com/bisnexishome/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=1018bacc-0536-4018-87df-b2baf0600873> [accessed: 01/08/2022].

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> BFI (2022b) Roles, **BFI Filmography** [online] Available at: <https://filmography.bfi.org.uk/credits> [accessed: 01/08/2022].

characters. This initial survey of literature finds that PFT is more often perceived as a beacon of diversity and creative freedom than as depressing propaganda (see Chapter 3 for more on this).

In the 1960s, there was a fruitful cross-fertilisation between theatre, television and education, underpinned by generous governmental provision of Arts subsidy. Furthermore, TV took on trainees who would include many of PFT's future luminaries, some of came from working-class backgrounds, then went to grammar-school and Oxford University, like Ken Loach and Dennis Potter. During the 1970s, BBC bosses, and overseers like the Annan Committee, were largely supportive of the single-play and 'committed drama', seeing it in pluralistic terms as part of a balanced broadcasting ecology incorporating a wide range of British voices. In their positioning within the BBC, the PFT producers Tony Garnett, Kenith Trodd, Margaret Matheson and Richard Eyre appear like a plucky guerrilla cell, offering a left-wing counterweight to the BBC's usual occupation of the perceived political centre-ground. A counter-argument has been developed that the strand excluded women; while this seems a misguided and inexact claim, which ignores wider contexts, it is a hypothesis which will be tested in Chapter 5.

However, PFT coincided with a moment when pluralistic left-wing alliances were defeated by the emergent authoritarian populism and neoliberalism of Margaret Thatcher's Conservatives. Thatcher's success was enabled by discursive constructions of a 1970s Britain in crisis and decline, which many left-wing historians have convincingly challenged. The Conservative restoration in the 1980s was marked by a gradual decline in support for challenging single-plays, while PFT writers like Dennis Potter, Willy Russell and Colin Welland increasingly worked on series or feature-films.<sup>212</sup> A range of practitioners, academics and journalists forward a metanarrative that TV drama lost its risk-taking approach during the Checkland and Birt regimes of 1987-2000. In Peter Ansorge and Don Taylor's accounts, PFT stands as a beacon of varied humanist drama, which was wantonly forsaken by BBC managers who abandoned the pursuit of pluralism for a cynical, economistic drive for cost-cutting and high viewing figures.

TV critics and industry insiders have canonised PFT, and its predecessor, TWP, perceiving the strand as a metonym for the challenging, topical, socio-political single-play. While the single-play has receded somewhat within Creeber's academic textbook and been supplanted by series and serial dramas for many broadsheet critics, the *Telegraph's* critics used discourses of quality, eclecticism and seriousness which anticipated how TWP and

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<sup>212</sup> Russell's exceptional drama serial *One Summer* (1983) feels like a PFT, vividly extended.

PfT were remembered during the latter's fiftieth anniversary in 2020. The most frequently canonised plays *Cathy*, *Abigail's Party* and *Blue Remembered Hills* reflect how Ken Loach, Mike Leigh and Dennis Potter are also PfT's most discussed creative figures. The contrasting left-wing creators Loach and Trevor Griffiths have been canonised rather more by the BFI panel and academics, while Leigh and Potter have been fêted more by the journalistic TV critics, perhaps due to their pricklier, individual styles and their more ambiguous politics, which, while still left-of-centre, are closer to the perceived centre-ground.

While the journalistic critics do pay lip service to *Cathy*, and, occasionally mention, say, David Mercer's *In Two Minds* or Griffiths's *Comedians*, they elide PfT's more politicised output. This both dispels the notion of PfT as quantitatively rife with 'left-wing propaganda', while also suggesting an underlying cultural aversion to the rare but potent instances where the strand was overtly radical. PfT's fantastical excursions, which use or defy popular genres, like *Robin Redbreast*, *Penda's Fen* or *Gangsters*, are increasingly admired by academics, but, with occasional exceptions, they remain neglected by journalists. Access to the vast PfT archive, via BluRay releases, Box of Broadcasts and BFI Mediatheque, is being addressed more briskly than before this study began, but there is still a long way to go before PfTs are more widely available so that more people can enjoy and discuss them.

## Chapter 2

### ‘Drama does not live by words alone’: Aesthetics and Style in Play for Today

For many of us in the 1960s and 1970s, removed from what was happening in theatre either by geographical distance or by the taint of social exclusiveness, and with little to interest us in British film after 1963, television drama seemed to be one of the places in which surprises might occur and in which boundaries might be shifted a little [...] (John Caughie).<sup>1</sup>

The role played by sound stems from the fact that it radiates in all directions, whereas view of the TV image is sometimes restricted. [...] So sound is used to ensure a certain level of attention, to drag viewers back to looking at the set (John Ellis).<sup>2</sup>

I remember showing a Cinema Action film on housing in a big hall in the Bull Ring [in] Birmingham. It started with machine-gun noises, and Horace Cutler, the hated Tory head of the Greater London Council, being mowed down. The whole place just stopped and looked, but, of course, as soon as you got talking heads, people arguing or living their ordinary lives, doing their washing or whatever, we lost the audience (Marc Karlin).<sup>3</sup>

The talking head, says Bennett, is a synonym in television for boredom. But real television boredom happens (often in programmes that seem to be visually rich) when the word becomes a written lecture that carries the content and the pictures become no more than illustration [...] (Albert Hunt).<sup>4</sup>

[In] a good director’s hands other things develop – silences, moments... Drama does not live by words alone (Piers Haggard).<sup>5</sup>

#### 2.1. Introduction

In a recent interview, the film critic and screenwriter David McGillivray spoke, self-deprecatingly, about how director Pete Walker regarded McGillivray’s first draft of *House of Mortal Sin* (1975) as ‘a Play for Today with murders’.<sup>6</sup> McGillivray feels that this and his previous horror film with Walker, *Frightmare* (1974), are excessively ‘slow [...] too much dialogue, not enough action’, unlike their first collaboration *House of Whipcord* (1974), which achieved the requisite balance.<sup>7</sup> This crystallises a view of PFT as talk-

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<sup>1</sup> Caughie, J. (2000) *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism & British Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 58.

<sup>2</sup> Ellis, J. (1992) *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video*. London: Routledge, 128.

<sup>3</sup> Karlin, M. (2001) Making Images Explode, in: S. Rowbotham & H. Beynon (eds.) *Looking at Class: Film, Television and the Working Class in Britain*. London: Rivers Oram Press, 151.

<sup>4</sup> Hunt, A. (1993) *Talking Heads: ‘Bed Among the Lentils’* (Alan Bennett), in: G.W. Brandt (ed.) *British Television Drama in the 1980s*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 37.

<sup>5</sup> Haggard quoted in: Self, D. (1984) *Television Drama: An Introduction*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 81.

<sup>6</sup> McGillivray quoted in: *A Crazy, Mixed-up Kid* (2020), BFI Flipside 041: **Short Sharp Shocks** [BFIB1396] BluRay extra.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

centric, but also implies its cultural centrality in being an obvious reference point for a populist genre filmmaker like Walker to use to describe his collaborator's garrulous scriptwriting style.

As elucidated in the literature review, much has been written concerning the words spoken by PFT writers and directors Griffiths, Leigh, Loach and Potter and those used in their dramas. However, Jonathan Bignell has highlighted a lack of focus on the 'visual aesthetics' of studio drama, as a form of 'experimentation within popular forms', barring Helen Wheatley's analysis of *Armchair Theatre* and *Upstairs, Downstairs* (1971-75).<sup>8</sup> To better understand PFT's visual styles, this Chapter seeks to address the following research questions:

- 1. How did PFT's visual and auditory aesthetics evolve over time?
- 2. Are John Caughie and Hannah Andrews's claims true that film overtook theatre as the primary influence on PFT and aspiration for its creative personnel?
- 3. Is there a substantial aesthetic or stylistic difference between PFT's uses of film and video? Is there an aesthetic binary of video/studio/slow and film/location/fast?
- 4. Did PFT use radical and non-naturalistic or conservative and naturalistic stylistic approaches?
- 5. Which genres did PFT predominantly use? Are there trends over time?

In order to tackle these questions, Chapter 2 adopts a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative research, blending aesthetic and socio-historical approaches. It commences with an account of pertinent arguments about aesthetics and style in film and television studies. This is followed by overviews of which genres PFT drew upon and its uses of musical underscores and sound design. Next, there is extensive data analysis of a sample of a quarter of PFT concerning editing pace and visual style, and then textual analysis of a gazetteer of eight PFTs which constitute a microcosm of the style's various visual aesthetics. Appendix 4 provides a detailed supplement, tracing PFT's shifting identity through the historical development of what united these one-off dramas: their seven title sequences, while Appendix 5 provides historical statistics concerning PFT's aesthetics.<sup>9</sup> This chapter will attend to the intricacies of, and contrasts between, film and videotape

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<sup>8</sup> Bignell, J. (2007) Citing the classics: Constructing British television drama history in publishing and pedagogy, in: H. Wheatley (ed.) *Re-Viewing Television History: Critical Issues in Television Historiography*. London: I.B. Tauris, 39.

<sup>9</sup> For additional qualitative analysis of PFT's seven title sequences via a public survey, see May, T. (2022) *Play for Today's Title Sequences*, **Forgotten Television Drama**, 19 Jun [online] Available at: <https://forgottentelevisiondrama.wordpress.com/2022/06/19/play-for-todays-title-sequences/> [accessed: 01/08/2022].

aesthetics in PFT, and challenge all forms of artistic purism, while acknowledging that film and video *do* possess distinct benefits and limitations.

## **2.2. Mediums – film, theatre, television – and video and film styles**

[I]t was presented on television, and is therefore television (Tony Garnett).<sup>10</sup>

There has been debate as to whether film or theatre was the more suitable referent for PFT. Shaun Sutton, BBC Head of Drama (1969-81), notes that the video-studio aesthetic was a cost-effective ‘factory for the Arts’, while Don Taylor and Leah Panos emphasise, respectively, its ‘poetry’ and its ‘space for ideas’.<sup>11</sup> Yet, Peter Ansorge, Glen Creeber and Hannah Andrews have noted the greater prestige that the costlier filmed aesthetic accrued in comparison to video.<sup>12</sup> David Rolinson perceives the gradual 1970s and 1980s shift away from video-shot theatre adaptations towards making ‘an alternative national cinema’, citing PFT director Alan Clarke’s analogy of BBC Plays to the Hollywood studio-system of the 1930s-40s.<sup>13</sup> PFT producer Richard Eyre notes that he was allotted 10 PFT slots a year, eight video and two film, while his colleague Ken Trodd was given three video and two film slots; Tara Prem adds that BBC Birmingham had a quota of 3-6 films a year, which largely became PFTs.<sup>14</sup> Trodd and Rose would sometimes use money earmarked for PFT to make other projects, like the video-led *Pennies from Heaven* (1978) and the all-filmed *Artemis 81* (1981).<sup>15</sup> These facts collectively convey how PFT creators increasingly aspired to make films, rather than theatrical videoed plays, however more economical the latter were.

What Andrews perceives as a convergence between television (TV) and film began with Garnett and Loach’s use of 16mm film on TWP *Up the Junction* (1965) (*UTJ*).

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<sup>10</sup> Garnett, T. et al (1964) Reaction: Replies to Troy Kennedy Martin’s attack on naturalistic television drama, *Encore* (11)3, May-Jun, 45.

<sup>11</sup> Sutton, S. (1982) *The Largest Theatre in the World: Thirty Years of Television Drama*. London: BBC Books, 10, 127; Taylor, D. (1998) Pure imagination, poetry’s lyricism, Titian’s colours: Whatever happened to the studio play on British TV? *New Statesman*, 6 Mar, 39; Panos, L. (2010). Realism and Politics in Alienated Space: Trevor Griffiths’s Plays of the 1970s in the Television Studio, *New Theatre Quarterly*, (26)3, 276. Sutton succeeded Newman in May 1969, leaving the post in July 1981 to be succeeded by the most prolific PFT producer Graeme McDonald.

<sup>12</sup> Ansorge, P. (1997) *From Liverpool to Los Angeles: On Writing for Theatre, Film and Television*. London: Faber and Faber, 38; Creeber, G. (ed.) (2001) *The Television Genre Book*. London: BFI, 13; Andrews, H. (2014) *Television and British Cinema: Convergence and Divergence since 1990*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 46. Ansorge, a PFT producer and script editor, nevertheless reflects that, ‘Television plays alone live naturally in people’s living rooms and nowhere else’.

<sup>13</sup> Rolinson, D. (2010) The Last Studio System: A Case for British Television Films, in: P. Newland (ed.) *Don’t Look Now: British Cinema in the 1970s*. Bristol: Intellect, 165-168.

<sup>14</sup> Eyre, R. (2020) interview with author, 16 Nov; Prem, T (2021a) Interview with author, 29 Jan. Eyre adds that a video-led hybrid like *Cries from a Watchtower* (1979) came about through ‘horse-trading’ over money and resources. Its film material was shot with a very small crew.

<sup>15</sup> Trodd, K. (2020) interview with author, 22 Oct; see Appendix 5.

Conversely, in the 1980s, as David Bordwell highlights, there was a parallel acceleration in what critic Vincent Canby has called a ‘televisualization’ of feature-films in using tighter close-ups to suit video releases and TV screenings.<sup>16</sup> Previewing a National Film Theatre season in 1971 of Italian ‘telefilms’ by the Radio-televisione Italiana (RAI) state company, Ken Wlaschin noted the numbers of Italian film directors who were happily working for TV, but how British feature-film directors like Anderson, Lester, Losey, Reisz and Richardson were not following suit.<sup>17</sup> Theorist Mark Fisher described Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s two-part *World on a Wire* (1973), made for Westdeutscher Rundfunk public service channel, and David Rudkin’s BBC Birmingham films *Penda’s Fen* (1974) and *Artemis 81* as ‘visionary television’, where ‘there is a vertiginous enjoyment to be had from allowing oneself to fall into the unknown’.<sup>18</sup> Another filmed Pebble Mill PFT, *Licking Hitler* (1978), was described in its titles as ‘A film by David Hare’, asserting this writer-director’s auteur-like status.<sup>19</sup> From 1982, as Caughie argues, the rise of ‘independent’ production, combined with broadcasting institutions’ focus on ‘cost-efficiency’, led to the TV single-play’s increasingly rapid demise.<sup>20</sup>

In 1982, David Hare argued, dogmatically, that ‘directors’ and ‘the public’ prefer films shot on location to videotaped plays made in the ‘stale over-lit shells’ of BBC’s TV Centre; academic Phil Wickham backed Hare in comparing unfavourably the studio’s ‘harsh’ lighting with the ‘naturalism’ of film.<sup>21</sup> Producer David Rose noted that, ‘In the studio, you are dependent on words. There’s a limit to the imagery that can be conjured up in the studio. Film can say so much else. Space is created!’<sup>22</sup> Lez Cooke supports Rose and Hare’s pro-film discourse in arguing that Alan Bleasdale’s *Scully’s New Year’s Eve* (1978), a rare Pebble Mill videoed production, ‘suffered from being confined to the

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<sup>16</sup> Bordwell, D. (2006) *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 148, 264.

<sup>17</sup> Wlaschin, K. (1971) Italian TV Film Festival, *National Film Theatre programme*, Apr-May, 16 [Popular Film and Television Archive, Northumbria University]. Wlaschin previews 11 telefilms by directors including Bertolucci, Blasetti, Fellini, Olmi and Rossellini, quoting Bertolucci on how TV gave a ‘greater breath of freedom than in the cinema’. Among established filmmakers, Lindsay Anderson worked on the unofficial PFT *Home* (1972), while Desmond Davis and Bryan Forbes worked on 1974 and 1980 PFTs.

<sup>18</sup> Fisher, M. (2010) Visionary Television: *World on a Wire* and *Artemis 81*, *Film Quarterly*, 64(2), 63.

<sup>19</sup> Andrews (2014) op. cit. According to Kenith Trodd, four filmed TV dramas preceded *UTJ*: three *Six* (1964) dramas and Loach and Christopher Logue’s TWP *The End of Arthur’s Marriage* (1965): Trodd, K. (1983) The Trodd Index, in: J. Pilling & K. Canham (eds.) *The Screen on the Tube: Filmed TV Drama*. Norwich: OPS / Cinema City, 54.

<sup>20</sup> Caughie (2000) op. cit. 203-204).

<sup>21</sup> Hare, D. (1982) Ah! Mischief: The Role of Public Broadcasting, in F. Pike (ed.) *Ah! Mischief: The Writer and Television*. London: Faber and Faber, 45-46; Wickham, P. (2007) *Understanding Television Texts*. London: British Film Institute, 18.

<sup>22</sup> Cooke, L. (2012) *A Sense of Place: Regional British television drama, 1956-82*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 124.

studio'.<sup>23</sup> Interviewed on the *South Bank Show* (1978), Hare specifically describes the following week's PFT *Licking Hitler*, produced by Rose, as a film and not as TV:

I think it's almost impossible to have decent standards in television studios on videotape. I think it's a hack bum medium in which no good work can be done at all [...] I think it looks ugly, it sounds awful and design standards are appalling and that there is nothing you can do with it to make it vivid. But that film is the great dream medium of the twentieth century, because it's quick, it's witty and it's fast and [...] versatile.<sup>24</sup>

Hare claimed that too many video-taped PFTs simply used the studios to enable the BBC to gain returns on its investment on building them and he proposes more investment in mobile package-units over in-house producer-units.<sup>25</sup> However, Hare's suggested wholesale move to film would have meant a reduction in PFT's yearly output. According to Sutton, in 1972, a filmed PFT was 1.5 times more expensive than a videoed PFT that used film inserts; by 1982, a 90-minute filmed PFT was almost 2.5 times more costly.<sup>26</sup> In TWP's era, BBC1 Controller Michael Peacock claimed that tight budgets would mean 'B' movies rather than 'A' quality plays'; Jonathan Bignell notes how video technology produced images of higher definition than the 16mm film that had been standard for inserts or all-filmed WPs and PFTs since *UTJ*.<sup>27</sup> Hare's jaundiced view of VS was influenced by his own negative experience with the primarily studio-made *Brassneck* (1975); he claimed that 'nearly all' viewers said they preferred filmed to taped plays.<sup>28</sup> While Hare cites no statistical or reception evidence to support his assertion, it was, significantly, echoed by Michael Grade's claim that audiences are more 'drawn to anything labelled film than to 'single plays''.<sup>29</sup> Kenith Trodd expresses a preference for escaping the studio for film, and the filmed *Blue Remembered Hills* (1979) is his favourite PFT, though Trodd productions such as *Taking Leave* (1974), *Tiptoe Through the Tulips* (1976) and *Ladies* (1980) use VS astutely.<sup>30</sup>

In 1982, the movement towards film increased with Channel 4's Film on Four, led by its commissioning editor for fiction, David Rose, who in 1972-80 produced 25 PFTs from

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 122-123, 151.

<sup>24</sup> Hare bemoans 'low standards; in television drama; when pressed on this by Melvyn Bragg, he admits this is his own 'squeamishness and snobbishness'. In: *The South Bank Show* (1978).

<sup>25</sup> Hare (1982) op. cit.

<sup>26</sup> Sutton (1982) op. cit. 140-141.

<sup>27</sup> Bignell, J. (2014) The Spaces of The Wednesday Play (BBC TV 1964-1970): Production, Technology and Style, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, (34)3, 375, 379. PFT's 1976-77 titles used 35mm (see Appendix 4).

<sup>28</sup> *The South Bank Show* op. cit.

<sup>29</sup> Grade quoted in: Hill, J. & McLoone, M. (eds.) (1996) *Big Picture, Small Screen: The Relations between Film and Television*. Luton: University of Luton Press, 179. Grade became BBC1 Controller on 1 August 1984, the month the final official PFT was broadcast.

<sup>30</sup> BFI (2020). *BFI at Home – Play for Today at 50*, **YouTube**, 1 Oct [online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5aDqm33IEuE> [accessed: 01/08/2022].

Pebble Mill's English Regions Drama unit. Many of PFT's creative personnel seized the chance to follow Rose to Channel 4 and 'escape' from the BBC's studio, with its surveillance and interference, for the 'freedom' of film and location shooting (FL).<sup>31</sup> The shift of original TV drama to film is unarguable, historically: Film on Four/FilmFour (1982-2004), Screen One (1989-98) and Screen Two (1985-98) all outlasted the video-centric The Play on One (1988-91), which John Cook perceives as the last-gasp of contemporary *plays* shown on BBC1 in prime-time.<sup>32</sup>

However, Seán Day-Lewis counter-argued that this rush towards film was folly, leading to TV drama being starved of resources, while Don Taylor discerned a decrease in plays tackling complex ideas, which had used the video and studio aesthetic (VS) with painterly ingenuity.<sup>33</sup> Taylor argues for the essentially *discursive* quality of the best VS one-off dramas, which are, he emphasises, 'plays', granting the writer primacy. Furthermore, Charles Barr challenges Hare's position, claiming that much filmed drama is actually 'equally deficient in the strengths of good television and of good cinema'.<sup>34</sup> Barr quotes Alfred Shaughnessy, co-creator of *Upstairs, Downstairs* and a more populist figure than Taylor: 'Remember, television is electronic theatre, not second-rate film'.<sup>35</sup> PFT writer and critic W. Stephen Gilbert lists directors who loved the 'disciplines' the studio offered: Alan Bridges, Gareth Davies, Barry Davis, John Glenister, Piers Haggard, Peter Hammond, Bill Hays, Michael Lindsay-Hogg, James MacTaggart, Philip Saville, Don Taylor and Herbert Wise.<sup>36</sup> Gilbert elides the director Jane Howell, perceived by Billy Smart and Susan Willis

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<sup>31</sup> For this Panoptic 'escape' paradigm, see: Sutton (1982) op. cit. 90; Sexton, J. (2003) 'Televérité' hits Britain - documentary, drama and the growth of 16mm filmmaking in British television, *Screen* (44)4, Winter, 440-442; Forster, L. (2012) 1970s Television: A Self-conscious decade, in: S. Harper. & J. Smith (eds.) *British Film Culture in the 1970s: The Boundaries of Pleasure*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 96. In addition to Hare, Ken Loach, Mike Leigh, Tony Garnett and Trevor Griffiths have all voiced this perspective; see Loach interviewed in: *Melvyn Bragg on TV: The Box That Changed the World* (2017) and Loach and Leigh in: *Drama out of a Crisis* (2020). Also: Whitehead, T. (2007) *British Film Makers: Mike Leigh*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 40; Cardullo, B. (2010) "Making People Think Is What It's All About": An Interview with Mike Leigh, *Cinema Journal* 50, 1, 11; Garnett, T. (2016) *The Day the Music Died: A Life Lived Behind the Lens*. London: Constable, 136; Griffiths, T. (1982) Countering Consent: An Interview with John Wyver, in F. Pike (ed.) *Ah! Mischief*, 31.

<sup>32</sup> Cook insightfully analyses TPOO, which was led by BBC Scotland Head of Drama Bill Bryden: Cook, J.R. (2017). 'A View from North of the Border': Scotland's 'Forgotten' Contribution to the History of the Prime-Time BBC1 Contemporary Single TV Play Slot, *Visual Culture in Britain*, (18)3, 325-341. BBC2's Theatre Night (1985-90) and Performance (1991-98) strands were largely adaptations of existing theatre texts from the near-past, including several by PFT dramatists Hare, David Storey, Lesley Bruce, Stewart Parker, Caryl Churchill, Arnold Wesker and John Osborne and a televisual text by Dennis Potter. ScreenPlay (1986-93) was closest to PFT in its proportions of VS and FL, though also shifted to more film productions over time.

<sup>33</sup> Day-Lewis, S. (1998) *Talk of Drama: Views of the Television Dramatist Now and Then*. Luton: University of Luton Press, 4-7; Taylor op. cit.

<sup>34</sup> Barr, C. (1996) "They Think It's All Over": The Dramatic Legacy of Live Television, in: Hill & McLoone (eds.) *Big Picture, Small Screen*, 69.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Gilbert, W.S. (1995) *Fight and Kick and Bite: The Life and Work of Dennis Potter*. London: Spectre, 15.

as a highly artful studio director on the BBC Television Shakespeare (1978-85).<sup>37</sup> Director Moira Armstrong argues that, ‘if used properly’, the studio could be ‘just as exciting as the theatre’ and enabled the ‘imaginative’, in contrast to the filmed realism that TV drama increasingly privileged.<sup>38</sup> PFT producers Margaret Matheson and Ann Scott argue that the cost-effective VS aesthetic could create compelling worlds, centred on actors’ performances of ‘sustained dialogue’ in a way impossible on film.<sup>39</sup>

Table 2.1 provides a summary of the two technologically-informed styles associated with film and video. The ideas and terms therein will be unpicked and exemplified in subsequent sections.

**Table 2.1. Film and Video styles**

FILM	VIDEO
Cinema	Theatre
16mm film (FL)	2 inch video-tape (VS)
Chief advocate: David Hare	Chief advocate: Don Taylor
Recognisable locations	Designed studio sets
Social Realism	Plurality of genres
Journalistic	Artistic
Polemical	Discursive
<i>The truth</i> – creative team’s view of deep social truths (a ‘closed’ text)	<i>Many truths</i> – a range of perspectives and contestations (an ‘open’ text)
Objective perspective on social situations (Kennedy Martin)	Subjective artistic creation (Don Taylor)
‘Freedom’ (Hare, Loach)	‘Restriction’ (Hare, Loach)

Some have, justifiably, complicated this video-film binary. Hannah Andrews describes

<sup>37</sup> Smart, B. (2010) *Old Wine in New Bottles – Adaptation of Classic Theatrical Plays on BBC Television 1957-1985*. Royal Holloway College [unpublished Ph.D. thesis], 346-347, 359-368; Willis, S. (1991) *The BBC Shakespeare Plays: Making the Televised Canon*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of Carolina Press, 165-186.

<sup>38</sup> Armstrong, M. (2015) Interview with Darrol Blake and John Sealey, 18 Jul, **British Entertainment History Project** #556 [online] Available at: <https://historyproject.org.uk/interview/moira-armstrong> [accessed: 10/01/2023].

<sup>39</sup> *Drama out of a Crisis* (2020).

David Rose's ERD unit as a cross between a repertory theatre and a film studio.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, for most of PFT's run, Head of Drama Shaun Sutton pursued a compromising 'liberal policy', making best use of both film and video, citing director John Glenister as an equally happy practitioner of both.<sup>41</sup> Lez Cooke perceives that *Kisses at Fifty* (1973) (hereafter *KAF*) exemplifies how PFT mixed these aesthetics: VS conveying claustrophobia, while FL 'open(s) the play out [capturing] the reality of a social situation without moralising or didacticism'.<sup>42</sup> *KAF* built on an earlier video-led hybrid, David Halliwell's TWP *Cock, Hen and Courting Pit* (1966): Jonathan Bignell notes a third of this was filmed, and that there was 'much praise' from viewers for its 'aesthetic achievement'.<sup>43</sup> Cooke associates FL as connoting *authenticity*, in presenting recognisable places.<sup>44</sup> Contrastingly, Taylor's idea of VS is where the writer's *discursive* enunciation of ideas is magnified by sensitive staging within the spaces of a designed set. While Sutton was generally balanced over the merits of film and video, he claimed that viewers noticed the 'crude' cuts from film inserts to VS and criticised how directors used Outside Broadcast (OB) techniques, shooting with videotape on location to ponderously survey landscapes and neglect actors, whose dialogue would often be drowned out by ambient sounds, e.g. a waterfall.<sup>45</sup>

Glen Creeber claimed that the social realist genre was enabled via 'new recording techniques, easier editing facilities and newer lightweight cameras', citing Garnett's meta-narrative of the escape from the studio.<sup>46</sup> Probing deeper, Jamie Sexton detailed how the docudrama *Culloden* (1964) and TWP's 'landmark' *UTJ* creatively co-opted aesthetic techniques used previously in Denis Mitchell's TV documentaries, John Boorman's *Citizen '63* (1963-64) and *World in Action*.<sup>47</sup> The move to 16mm film enabled this form of *televérité* to blend drama and documentary – 16mm was synonymous with its use in news, current affairs and documentary programming from 1957-63. However, Charles Barr has argued that, other than in soap operas and outliers like *Talking Heads* (1988-2020), the

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<sup>40</sup> Andrews (2014) op. cit. 48.

<sup>41</sup> Sutton op. cit. 90-91, 143. While we can associate Scott and Matheson with VS and Eyre, Rose and Trodd with FL, all these producers used both aesthetics.

<sup>42</sup> Cooke, L. (2015) *British Television Drama: A History*, 2nd edn. London: British Film Institute, 102-103.

<sup>43</sup> Bignell (2014) op. cit. 373-374.

<sup>44</sup> Authenticity is a 'truth-claim' many film curators and filmmakers make regarding the use of film stock. The retro artisanal aesthetic of the Cornwall-set feature-film *Bait* (2019) has been emphasised; Jason Wood and Jessica Kiang acclaim its use of a '1970s 16mm wind-up Bolex Camera', with 'artisanal expertise', while director Mark Jenkin rhapsodises: '16mm, black and white, dirty, full of grain, faces, working hands, the rough edges, warts and all, wild, tangible, real': Wood, J. (2019) *Taking the Bait*, *Bait* [BluRay, BFIB1367] booklet, 10; Kiang, J. (2019) *The Melancholy of the Real*, *ibid.*, 3; Jenkin, M. (2019) *Director's Statement*, *ibid.* 1.

<sup>45</sup> Sutton op. cit. 89, 103-104.

<sup>46</sup> Creeber (2001) op. cit. 13.

<sup>47</sup> Sexton op. cit. 431-432, 441.

potential for ‘liveness’ and immediacy in TV drama has been squandered in this rush to use film.<sup>48</sup>

Sexton disavows the simple technological determinism of the argument that *televérité* echoed news style; 16mm film was used for drama location shoots featuring handheld or unsteady lightweight camerawork, synchronous sound, still photographs, video montage and incidental background details. These new aesthetic codes, also influenced by US Direct Cinema and the British Documentary Film Movement, were deployed by McGrath, Martin, Loach and Garnett, to create an ‘authenticity’ that supported highly politically-charged ‘interventions’.<sup>49</sup> This implies that the continuous ‘live’ VS aesthetic was distanced from topical ‘reality’, being less convincing and immediate than the ‘authenticity’ and ‘virtual liveness’ offered by 16mm and its creative editing. All filmed PFTs used 16mm, a technology suited to construct dramas which immersed viewers in real-seeming spaces.<sup>50</sup> While Jean Seaton defends the maligned VS aesthetic, praising its use in Dennis Potter and Simon Gray’s TV plays and *Talking Heads*, Martin McLoone takes a more neutral approach, criticising director Alan Parker and critic James Park for their reductive and essentialist conflation of standard VS production processes as a deliberate aesthetic chosen by all TV drama directors.<sup>51</sup>

In his influential 1964 polemic ‘Nats Go Home’, writer Troy Kennedy Martin used analogies from other mediums to call for greater experimentation in TV drama beyond talking-heads naturalism: theatre (Brecht) and cinema (Resnais and Eisenstein) have produced ‘new kinds of objectiveness’ and fostered ‘emotional involvement’ via fast-edited montages.<sup>52</sup> Critic Martin Esslin echoed this, noting how film and TV directors have ‘total’ power over the audience’s point-of-view.<sup>53</sup> However, contrary to Martin’s sweeping association of theatre with naturalism and his polemical declarative that ‘All drama which

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<sup>48</sup> Barr op. cit. 68-72. Barr questions the influential idea in George Orwell (1937): ‘No human being ever wants to do anything in a more cumbrous way than is necessary’, arguing that TV drama directors simply using the latest production techniques may neglect the potential in TV’s unique aesthetic of liveness and relaying of ‘event’.

<sup>49</sup> Sexton op. cit. 432-433, 441-442. Sexton echoes Garnett’s ‘escape’ from the studio discourse: shooting amid recognisable, ‘real world’ locations enabled socially concerned writers and directors to ‘construct reports on real life’.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 431-432, 442.

<sup>51</sup> Seaton, J. (2015) *‘Pinkoes and Traitors’: The BBC and the nation, 1974-1987*. London: Profile Books, 263; McLoone, M. (1996) *Boxed In? : The Aesthetics of Film and Television*, in: J. Hill & M. McLoone (eds.) *Big Picture, Small Screen*, op. cit. 80, 98, 103.

<sup>52</sup> Martin, T.K. (1964) *nats go home: First Statement of a New Drama for Television*, *Encore*, (11)2, Mar-Apr, 29-31). Martin also argues for television to incorporate literary forms of stream of consciousness and diary in its storytelling – avoiding linear ‘plot’ and expository dialogue – drawing inspiration from literature, e.g. Defoe, Woolf and the 18th century novel. Martin had studied with the BBC’s Langham Group, dedicated to experimental drama: Laing, S. (1986) *Representations of Working Class Life 1957-1964*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 169.

<sup>53</sup> Esslin, M. (1978) *An Anatomy of Drama*. London: Abacus, 79.

owes its form or substance to theatre plays is OUT’, Esslin acclaims the ‘extremely stimulating cross-fertilisation’ between theatre, film and TV.<sup>54</sup> See Appendix 5 for an account of how the strand drew on radio, literary and non-fiction source texts, while almost a tenth of PfTs originated as theatre plays.

Don Taylor uses the language of literature and art to emphasise the potential of TV drama using the VS aesthetic: ‘poetry’s lyricism’, ‘Pure imagination’ and ‘Titian’s colours’.<sup>55</sup> Taylor further argues that the single-play privileges writers, actors and content over style, with

dramatic thinking and emotion that is earned, passion that comes from deep wells of feeling plumbed by good words, not manufactured for melodramatic effect. It has its own visual style, more restricted than the cinema, and at its best quite unlike it.<sup>56</sup>

Notably, he claims it lacks ‘immediacy’ and ‘journalistic values’, which clashes with Newman and Garnett’s topical and agitational social realism, shot on film.<sup>57</sup> He doesn’t argue this tendency is bad drama per se, but that it has overly supplanted the writer-friendly VS aesthetic which produced ‘entertainment of unique focus and intellectual concentration’.<sup>58</sup> Taylor conflates social realism, film and populism, perceiving that, in the 1980s-90s, this became the hegemonic norm in British TV drama.<sup>59</sup> Contrarily, McLoone has argued that this ‘literary/theatrical sensibility’ of British TV drama, with its reverence for the writer, has constrained its directors and stunted its visual style.<sup>60</sup>

### **2.3. ‘Modernism’, ‘realism’ and ‘naturalism’**

John Lennard and Mary Luckhurst describe naturalism as an artistic movement of the 1880s-90s using a new realism in set design, replacing the elaborate painted backdrops and constructed objects of Victorian melodrama with real-world objects.<sup>61</sup> Naturalistic theatre acting evokes ‘normality’, supplanting stylised movements and line delivery, to create ‘natural illusions’, with the staging giving the illusion of real places and people.<sup>62</sup> Kenneth

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<sup>54</sup> Martin (1964) op. cit. 23. Esslin notes how Pinter’s *The Lover* and *The Collection* were both originally written for TV but later adapted for stage and how many creative personnel have moved easily between all of the mediums: *ibid.* 77-83.

<sup>55</sup> Taylor (1998) op. cit. 38.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.* 39. Taylor argues that television and theatre are mutually supported when closely linked, illustrated by how television made Osborne, Stoppard, Mercer and Pinter widely known.

<sup>60</sup> McLoone op. cit. 95, 100. McLoone cites Malcolm Page’s extensive index of published TV plays as evidence of this literary dominance. Notably, this was published soon after the original Trodd Index which listed filmed TV dramas: Page, M. (1977) *Published British Television Plays: An Annotated Bibliography*, *Theatre Quarterly*, (7)27, Autumn, 71-85; Trodd, K. (1977) *The Trodd Index*, *Broadcast*, 22 Aug, a47-a51.

<sup>61</sup> Lennard, J. & Luckhurst, M. (2002) *The Drama Handbook: A guide to reading plays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 347-348.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

Pickering's canon of naturalist playwrights includes Hauptmann, Tolstoy, Strindberg, Ibsen and Chekhov, whose innovative dialogue aimed to approximate closely the 'patterns and vocabulary of everyday speech', while, later, Stanislavsky's 'deployment of detail' enabled actors to evoke the real world.<sup>63</sup> Derek Paget claims that TV realism is a descendant of this theatrical naturalism, with TV actors avoiding any direct address to the camera, instead providing 'low-key' performances of 'believable physical behaviours' within a *mise-en-scène* which replicates 'as far as possible real-world original interiors and exteriors'.<sup>64</sup>

Most PFTs drew on naturalism, whether via grainy 16mm FL aesthetics or the quotidian immediacy of VS aesthetics. However, the strand's populist topicality also relied on earlier analogues such as 'sensation-drama', which via Irish playwright Dion Bouccicault, was popular on the London and New York stage during the 1840s-90s; his plays used illusionistic staging to dramatize extreme events.<sup>65</sup> Paget details how the docudrama genre combines the documentary's soundly researched factual basis with less 'sober' dramatic devices drawn from melodrama to dramatise public truths.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, TWP *Cathy* used 16mm naturalism to enact extreme, if representative, events, while drawing briefly on non-naturalistic techniques to escape 'balance'.<sup>67</sup> *Cathy* fulfils Steven N. Lipkin and Hannah Andrews's perception that the 'lens of melodrama' brings a 'moral clarity', restores order and affirms emotional truths, more coherently and directly than naturalism or realism to present 'persuasive argument[s]' to audiences.<sup>68</sup>

Verisimilitude in staging and performance was key to getting audiences to accept PFT dramatists' sometimes trenchant perspectives. Pickering notes that character is a transaction that arises from the juxtaposition of text, the actor's embodiment and the audience's recognition, arguing that character has become the staple ingredient of TV drama.<sup>69</sup> This links to the conventional 'well-made play', which has five stages –

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<sup>63</sup> Pickering, K. (2010) *Key Concepts in Drama and Performance*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 120-122. Pickering claims playwrights were influenced by Charles Darwin's ideas in depicting environments as determining characters and notes that 'accurate reconstructions' of real environments were enhanced by the 'box set', created by Stanislavsky's designer Simov, imposing an imaginary 'Fourth Wall' between the actors and audience – the former pretend to be oblivious to the latter, signifying the set as a 'real' space.

<sup>64</sup> Paget, D. (2011) *No Other Way to Tell It: Dramadoc/docudrama on television*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 57, 112.

<sup>65</sup> Lennard & Luckhurst op. cit. 93, 159.

<sup>66</sup> Paget op. cit. 150, 165, 270.

<sup>67</sup> Paget's conception of docudrama has its roots in the Theatre Workshop play *Oh What A Lovely War* (1963) and *Cathy*, which 'work with facts and through entertainment to provoke a questioning stance towards historical events [and] social policy [...] and the political consequences of both': *ibid.* 19.

<sup>68</sup> Lipkin, S.N. (2002) *Real Emotional Logic: Film and Television Docudrama as Persuasive Practice*. Carbondale, IL: South Illinois University Press, 5-11; Andrews, H. (2021) *Biographical Television Drama*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 41-54.

<sup>69</sup> Pickering op. cit. 83-84.

exposition, complication and development, crisis, denouement and resolution – each represented by Acts and Scenes.<sup>70</sup>

Production Head of Ealing Film Studios Michael Balcon advocated the documentary approach to filmmaking used, during the Second World War by directors Watt, Cavalcanti and Jennings, influenced by Flaherty and Grierson's earlier examples and newsreels. Addressing the Workers' Film Association in 1943, Balcon articulated a binary of 'tinsel' and 'realism', using the former pejoratively to describe films with showy, theatrical acting in contrast to the new vogue for using non-professional actors in story-documentaries.<sup>71</sup> Balcon bemoaned the lingering predominance of theatre adaptations in British cinema, pre-echoing Martin's claim that TV was ineffectually mimicking theatre.<sup>72</sup>

Caughie defines modernist TV drama as inherently 'serious', involving a level of difficulty and experimentalism associated with literary modernism.<sup>73</sup> While he implicitly complicates this by analysing TV dramas from the 1960s-80s, when TV was Britain's most popular cultural medium, he approaches the texts with a literary-inflected focus on authorship, privileging the PFT writers David Mercer and Dennis Potter, alongside Dunn, Loach and Garnett's *UTJ*.<sup>74</sup> Caughie inhabits the position of critic-as-connoisseur, explicitly arguing that Potter's *The Singing Detective* (1986) is a 'masterpiece'.<sup>75</sup> He makes a potent, if incomplete case, for how 'serious dramas' displayed a social conscience and unique artistry and created a civic-minded viewing public.<sup>76</sup>

David M. Earle and Mark Fisher have conceived of modernism as illimitable and complexly intertwined with the popular.<sup>77</sup> Earle finds that print history challenges a simplistic binaries of 'modernism' against 'populism'; these were 'in reality simultaneous

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<sup>70</sup> This was adopted for farces and melodramas and, more subtly, by Henrik Ibsen. It was attacked by George Bernard Shaw for leading to trivial characterisation and contrived, over-elaborate plotting; which Pickering sees as persisting in popular radio and TV soap operas: *ibid.* 69.

<sup>71</sup> Balcon, M. (1943) *Realism or Tinsel: a paper delivered by Michael Balcon production head of Ealing Studios to the Workers Film Association at Brighton*. London: Frederick A. Kahn, 3-4.

<sup>72</sup> Balcon accepts that some theatre adaptations can work, like *The Guardsman* (1931), a Hollywood adaptation of *Testőr* by Hungarian dramatist Ferenc Molnár. There is an irony in Balcon's post-war role as producer of the Ealing comedies cycle (1948-55): powerful myths of the British as a community-minded, eccentrically individualist people, played by professional, often stage-nurtured actors performing traits of the 'real people' who featured in the Second World War era documentaries.

<sup>73</sup> Caughie (2000) *op. cit.* 1-24. Caughie's work is underpinned by Frankfurt School theorists Adorno and Horkheimer and French realist novelist and essayist Émile Zola.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 108-124.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 172-173.

<sup>76</sup> Caughie's crucial work is limited by its lack of empirical evidence regarding the nature and size of the audiences for his 'serious' TV drama and what tangible societal impacts it may have had.

<sup>77</sup> Earle, D.M. (2009) *Re-Covering Modernism: Pulp, Paperbacks and the Prejudice of Form*. Farnham: Ashgate, 13; Fisher, M. (2014) *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*. Winchester: Zero Books, 22-23. Earle identifies the sort of oppressive power relations theorised by Foucault in how academic gatekeepers have excluded virtually all of 'pulp modernism' from their rarefied literary canons. He claims this high cultural snobbery is rooted in eugenics and xenophobia.

and not exclusive’: ‘racy’ book covers popularised Zola and D.H. Lawrence novels, James Joyce and O. Henry were published in *Smart Stories* magazine alongside pulp writers and many pulp fictions have a ‘social and political conscience’.<sup>78</sup> Christopher Bray situates popular modernism as a cultural manifestation of Britain’s liberalisation in 1965, quoting Dennis Potter on how the classlessness of TV viewing was building a ‘common culture’ and he claims that ‘by rendering the popular modernist and the modernist popular, the Britain of 1965 gave us the Britain we all of us live in’.<sup>79</sup> Fisher sees ‘UK popular modernism’ as manifested in Penguin books, postpunk music, the countercultural music press, Brutalist architecture and the BBC Radiophonic Workshop.<sup>80</sup> He argued that, ‘In popular modernism, the elitist project of modernism was retrospectively vindicated. At the same time, popular culture definitively established that it did not have to be populist’.<sup>81</sup> Fisher laments the ‘lost future’ promised by these currents, which updated Arnold Bennett’s idea of spreading culture more widely among the population.<sup>82</sup>

PfT emerged from this cultural diffusion, with its many grammar-schooled writers, directors and actors from working-class backgrounds.<sup>83</sup> In the 1970s, the greater cultural presence of working-class ‘inventiveness’ represented a devolution of power that was later undone by the centralising market populism of the Thatcher-Blair eras.<sup>84</sup> I would argue that PfT *exemplifies* Britain’s historically curtailed popular modernism in both the profusion and malleability of its genres and how, in the significant range in its audience sizes, it regularly straddled this manufactured cultural ‘divide’.

## **2.4. PfT’s genres and modes**

It is useful, if problematic, to assign genres to PfTs. Ordered, loosely, in a scale from the naturalistic to non-naturalistic, this section discerns how PfT used specific genres or modes, including social realism, docudramas, history plays, modernism, comedy, science fiction, fantasy, horror and melodrama. Designations are necessarily tentative: it is often a

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<sup>78</sup> Earle identifies an overt strain of populist cultural criticism from Arnold Bennett to John Carey, TV critic for *The Listener* (1969-73), which counters perceived elitists like Eliot, Woolf, Mumford and Eagleton: *ibid.* 3, 23, 69, 164-165, 169-170, 180-184.

<sup>79</sup> Bray, C. (2014) *1965: The Year Modern Britain Was Born*. London: Simon & Schuster, 245, 249-50, 278. Bray notes how cross-media popular modernist works – *The Avengers*, The Beatles, Edward Bond’s *Saved* and TWPs like *UTJ* and Dennis Potter’s two Brechtian *Nigel Barton* plays – expressed permissiveness and experimentalism.

<sup>80</sup> Fisher (2014) *op. cit.* Earle also notes the founding of Penguin in 1935 as a key practical development in the anti-elitist spreading of ‘culture’ to the middle-classes: *op. cit.* 165.

<sup>81</sup> See Caughie for an account of the Hoggartian complexion of the Pilkington Report 1962: *op. cit.* 84.

<sup>82</sup> Fisher (2014) *op. cit.* 22.

<sup>83</sup> Like Bray, Fisher has analysed Dennis Potter’s *Nigel Barton* WPs, alongside *Brimstone and Treacle* (1976): Fisher, M. (2018) [2004] *k-punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher*. London: Repeater Books, 107-110, 115-117.

<sup>84</sup> Fisher (2014) *op. cit.* 26.

fool's errand to pigeonhole a PFT within one specific category, as many of them utilise several genres or modes simultaneously.

### 2.4.1. Social Realism

PFT has been seen as synonymous with 'social realism'. Malcolm Page identifies a 'truism' that TV drama is 'most successful' when it provides social realism, or 'the drama of talking heads', in David Mercer's words.<sup>85</sup> Realism has often been used as a yardstick against which to judge other drama output. András Bálint Kovács sees Ken Loach, the PFT tradition's most famous realist practitioner, as using 'highly classical visual and narrative conception', which is less formally challenging than the Italian neorealism cinema that influenced him.<sup>86</sup> Historian Graham Stewart regards social realism based on 'contemporary issues' as in decline by the 1980s, sweepingly generalising that PFT's 'theatre-style stage sets looked dated' compared with the more realistic production techniques of *Brideshead Revisited* (1981).<sup>87</sup> Stewart perceives such film-shot literary adaptations – also including *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (1979) and *The Jewel in the Crown* (1984) – as gaining greater prestige with audiences and TV managers than the VS single-play, whose demise he does not regret. However, David Edgar laments this BBC 'retrenchment' and 'wholesale embrace of the Heritage industry', resulting in a time when you could not find TV dramas that were not set in 'a doctor's surgery, or a police station or the 19<sup>th</sup>-century'.<sup>88</sup>

Pioneering cultural studies scholars Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel criticised *Coronation Street* as insufficiently realist in its pacifying cosiness and as being 'calculated not to disturb'.<sup>89</sup> This was supported by writer Paula Milne's experiences of having her more ideologically challenging storyline for *Coronation Street* rejected; Milne found PFT gave her greater freedom, which emphasises how it could be a valuable counterweight to ideologically conformist mainstream TV dramas.<sup>90</sup> In 1975, Raymond Williams noted that the success of TV drama serials and series had created an over-reliance on police and medical genres; later, Peter Ansorge echoed this when criticising the dominance of 'cops and docs' dramas in the schedules, which stopped more original voices being

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<sup>85</sup> Page, M. (1972) The British Television Play: A Review Article, *Journal of Popular Culture*, (5)4, Spring, 810.

<sup>86</sup> Kovács, A.B. (2007) *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 278.

<sup>87</sup> Stewart, G. (2013) *Bang! A History of Britain in the 1980s*. London: Atlantic, 210. Via a medical metaphor, Stewart acclaims 'the full cinematic treatment' that Film on Four offered.

<sup>88</sup> Edgar in: BFI (2020) op. cit.

<sup>89</sup> Hall, S. & Whannel, P. (1964) *The Popular Arts*. London: Hutchinson Educational, 203-204.

<sup>90</sup> Milne quoted in: Day-Lewis op. cit. 107.

commissioned while enabling TV critics to stop taking TV drama writing seriously.<sup>91</sup> PFT included many health, legal or crime-themed social realism dramas that, often, challenged institutions and authority, unlike most long-running series: for example, *Through the Night* (1975), *A Story to Frighten the Children* (1976), *The Spongers* (1978), *Billy* (1979) and *Minor Complications* (1980). A group of Northern writers, who were just as comfortable working for ITV regional companies, including Colin Welland, Alan Plater and Arthur Hopcraft, created their own distinctive forms of heightened realism. 1976-77 was a zenith of PFT's social realism when roughly three-quarters of plays inhabited this mould, whether VS or FL. This mode's popular pull in the mid-1970s was evident in how Thames created its own six-part strand Plays for Britain (1976), which mostly mimicked PFT's social realism, while its Mike Leigh-directed title sequence playfully foregrounds contemporaneity.<sup>92</sup>

#### 2.4.2. RAIDS

Adapting BBC Head of Drama Sydney Newman's words, I define the most controversial type of PFT as RAIDS (Realistic, agitational, issue-based dramas).<sup>93</sup> This type inhabits what Ben Lamb terms a 'progressive social realism tradition': associated with the documentary-like dramatisation of political issues with a 'stark un-nostalgic' approach.<sup>94</sup> Lamb notes how TWP and PFT often gave a character's politicised perspective on events, which would narratively lead to change. The RAID incorporates, as Deborah Knight and Dave Forrest argue of Ken Loach's work, 'critical realism' or 'critique of current affairs'.<sup>95</sup> The RAID challenges what film director Luis Buñuel termed the 'official reality' of the powerful; as Albert Hunt claims Alan Bennett does more covertly with his foregrounding of ordinary people's gossip.<sup>96</sup> Barrie Keeffe's *Waterloo Sunset* (1979) and *King* (1984) foreground the voices of Black and working-class Londoners to challenge police racism

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<sup>91</sup> Williams, R. (1990) [1975] *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, 2nd edn. London: Routledge, 60; Anson (1997) op. cit. 124, 137.

<sup>92</sup> Also like PFT, Plays for Britain includes a RAID and comedy. All but one of its 18 credits for director, writer and producer went to people who had worked – or would later work – on PFT.

<sup>93</sup> Newman later claimed this type of WP 'causes people to take action after seeing it'. See: Macmurrough-Kavanagh, M.K. & Lacey, S. (1999) Who Framed Theatre? The 'Moment of Change' in British TV Drama, *New Theatre Quarterly*, 57, 65.

<sup>94</sup> Lamb, B. (2020) *You're nicked: Investigating British television police series*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 33, 61, 115.

<sup>95</sup> Knight, D. (1997) Naturalism, narration and critical perspective: Ken Loach and the experimental method, in: G. McKnight (ed.) *Agent of Challenge and Defiance: The Films of Ken Loach*. Trowbridge, Wilts: Flicks Books, 68; Forrest, D. (2013) *Social Realism: Art, Nationhood and Politics*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 84. As Forrest and Vice argue, Barry Hines's *The Gamekeeper* (1980) and *Looks and Smiles* (1981) offer 'a highly politicised' representation of class and land ownership. Forrest, D. & Vice, S. (2017). Screening South Yorkshire: *The Gamekeeper* and *Looks and Smiles*, in: E. Mazierska (ed.) *Heading North: The North of England in Film and Television*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 113.

<sup>96</sup> Hunt (1993) op. cit. 24.

and Thatcherite cuts to the NHS, through stories that are also deeply personalised.<sup>97</sup> They fuse the strand's dual public and private impulses: writer Rob Shearman neatly characterises PFT as offering the 'urgent and personal'.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, *Through the Night* and *Minor Complications* are RAIDs which expose problems within the NHS via human-centric drama, while Barry Hines's *Speech Day* (1973) is a 'complex', mordantly comedic dramatisation of 'educational problems and issues'.<sup>99</sup>

The filmed *The Rainbirds* (1971) and the videoed *Psy-Warriors* (1981) depict public and private politics in contrasting ways, while a nominal history play like *Brassneck* has RAID and docudramatic elements, given how it centres on the corruption of public men, influenced by the contemporary Poulson scandal. As Rolinson has analysed, *Leeds United!* (1974) is a (recent) history play from a 'bottom-up' perspective, based on a Leeds textile strike by women workers in 1970 and agitates in the contemporary context of 1974 by critiquing both factory and union bosses and favouring the rank-and-file workers.

Interpreting RAID criteria generously, in 1970-71, 19% of PFTs can be designated as RAIDs, falling to 17.6% in 1976-77, but increasing to a third in 1984, bolstered by Michael Wearing's productions. Notably, all of the 1984 RAIDs are either partly or fully set in the past or have flashbacks, though their issues of imperialism, gentrification, NHS underfunding, misogyny, secrecy in the intelligence services and the Northern Irish Troubles all carried resonance in Thatcher's contemporary Britain. In 1974-75, an apparent high-point of PFT's radicalism, 28.6% were RAIDs, including several identified as 'political' by Alasdair Milne – *Leeds United!*, *Taking Leave* (1974) and *Child of Hope* (1975) – but also *Baby Love* (1974), *Just Another Saturday* (1975) and *Brassneck* are clearly PFTs which dramatise socio-political issues, though McDougall's play is not straightforwardly 'radical', nor agitational.<sup>100</sup> While it is understandable that Milne missed the covert, but deep, political undercurrents in *Penda's Fen* or *Funny Farm* (1975) – both of which cannot quite be seen as RAIDs – it is odd that he elided *Baby Blues* (1973), surely just as notable a 'social' play as *In Two Minds* (1968), which he does list.

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<sup>97</sup> See Appendix 6 for further analyse of Keeffe's PFTs.

<sup>98</sup> Shearman quoted in: Kirkley, P. (2020) *The Myth Makers*, *Doctor Who Magazine* 542, Oct, 14.

<sup>99</sup> Masterman, L. (1980) *Teaching about Television*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 27, 162. Masterman praises this 'actually subversive comedy-drama', contrasting it with sitcoms like *The Likely Lads* (1964-66) and *Porridge* (1974-77).

<sup>100</sup> Milne, A. (1975) *The Committed Drama*, 16 Oct. BBC WAC T62/223 – Drama Programmes: Policy.

### 2.4.3. Docudramas

Being based on Welland's research of real events, *Leeds United!* also relates to the docudrama. This is a 'form of TV journalism' revealing the 'truth' about public events.<sup>101</sup> Derek Paget uses the term 'docudrama' to encompass a range of modalities blending fact and fiction, but he also acknowledges David Edgar's influential distinction between the drama-documentary, which tends to use the names and identities of real historical individuals and adheres relatively closely to the pattern of real events, and the documentary drama, which uses fictional constructs but which is underpinned by factual research.<sup>102</sup> Both are obsessed with establishing factual detail and in communicating truths. The drama-documentary is exemplified by Leslie Woodhead's *The Man Who Wouldn't Keep Quiet* (1970), with its austere approach, featuring named real-life characters and dramatising transcripts or documents, resembling the later stage genre of verbatim theatre.

As director Paul Greengrass explains, documentary doesn't take you *into* the event, only drama can do this.<sup>103</sup> A documentary drama like Peter Watkins's seminal *Culloden* achieves this by humanly illuminating British and Scottish history with its cast of non-actor Highlanders giving it 'emotional truth and power'.<sup>104</sup> TWP *Cathy* uses actors to convey the *reality* of being poor and homeless in 1960s Britain; as Paget details, writer Jeremy Sandford's social critique was based on 'demonstrable research'; while Woodhead, speaking in the documentary, claims Loach learned much from techniques deployed on Granada's *World in Action*.<sup>105</sup>

A more neglected early WP is *The July Plot* (1964), Roger Manvell's taut drama-documentary of the plot by German generals against Adolf Hitler's life on 20 July 1944. This is directed by Rudolph Cartier, Austrian émigré and a pioneering figure in early British TV drama, who heightens suspense and manipulates time and space. In a coda, surviving real-life people involved in the plot are briefly interviewed on camera. These WPs draw upon verifiable facts, while adopting dramatic strategies to *immerse* audiences in *events*; persuasively conveying deep emotional truths concerning the experiences of an assassination attempt and homelessness. As Paget argues, *Cathy* 'unquestionably stirred

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<sup>101</sup> *Drama Documentary: Imagining the Truth* (BBC4, 2005).

<sup>102</sup> Paget (2011) op cit. 156, 167; Edgar, D. (1988) On Drama-Documentary, in: *The Second Time as Farce: Reflections on the Drama of Mean Times*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 48-65.

<sup>103</sup> Greengrass in: *Drama Documentary: Imagining the Truth* (2006).

<sup>104</sup> Watkins expanded on his techniques with the controversial *The War Game* (1965), which the BBC commissioned but that was not shown until 31 July 1985 on BBC2. In *Drama Documentary: Imagining the Truth*, Leslie Woodhead claims he was influenced by Watkins's work. *Culloden* was repeated on BBC2 just 47 days after its original 1964 broadcast.

<sup>105</sup> Paget op. cit. 210.

the public conscience in the mid-1960s' and had lasting influence.<sup>106</sup> While *The July Plot* is a historical thriller, *Culloden* and *Cathy* make use of the sort of didacticism criticised by Cooke and Geraghty, but which Paget sees as part of docudrama's repertoire in making persuasive sense of a bewildering world.<sup>107</sup> Increasingly many latter-day PFTs used the dramatised-documentary mode – or, were, in Hannah Andrews's terms, bio-dramas – including *Child of Hope*, *Spend, Spend, Spend* (1977), *The Legion Hall Bombing* (1978), *A Hole in Babylon* (1979) and *The Union* (1981), alongside liminal PFTs *On Giant's Shoulders* (1979) and *Being Normal* (1983).<sup>108</sup>

#### 2.4.4. History plays

In parallel to the RAID and docudrama is the history play. Horace Newcomb and Colin McArthur have noted TV drama's 'mythic' uses of history, in which past events or characters are regularly dramatised, often in direct conversation with contemporary ideologies.<sup>109</sup> Richard Johnstone has analysed PFTs that fictionally dramatised Second World War and post-war British history: *Licking Hitler* (1978), *The Imitation Game* (1980) and *Country* (1981), while John Wyver discerns the lack of belief in the post-war Attlee order in these and *Rainy Day Women* (1984) (*RDW*).<sup>110</sup> Mike Newell directed two VS PFTs adapted from theatre texts: David Hare and Howard Brenton's *Brassneck* and David Edgar's *Destiny* (1978), both set in English Midlands towns, used as microcosms for the wider nation. They use composited or invented characters to personate a range of British political ideologies; Hare and Brenton present the 'decline' inherent in provincial corruption between local councillors and building companies, while Edgar depicts right-wing big businessmen and politicians obsessed with national 'decline', who ally with the far-right.

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid. 209-210.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 18-20.

<sup>108</sup> Andrews (2021) op. cit.

<sup>109</sup> Newcomb, H. (1974) *TV: The Most Popular Art*. New York: Doubleday, 258-263; McArthur, C. (1978) *Television and History*. London: British Film Institute. See also McLoone op. cit. 89. Newcomb analyses the human-centric complexity of *The Waltons* (1972-81), which illumines enduring, relevant myths in American culture through one family experiencing the Great Depression and sees it as complemented by *All in the Family* (1971-79), a sitcom which includes direct 'examination' of contemporary 'values and attitudes'.

<sup>110</sup> Johnstone, R. (1993) Television Drama and the People's War: David Hare's *Licking Hitler*, Ian McEwan's *The Imitation Game*, and Trevor Griffiths's *Country*, in: H. Zeifman & C. Zimmerman (eds.) *Contemporary British Drama, 1970-90*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 295-306; Wyver, J. (2022a) War and Peace: Play for Today's Home Front Quintet, *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, (19)2, 241-260. See Appendix 7 for my analysis with Alan Burton of *Licking Hitler*, *The Imitation Game* and *RDW* for how they represent the Secret War and femininity.

Some PFTs go further back in depicting real events and (some) real people, unlike the aforementioned six PFTs.<sup>111</sup> *Carson Country* (1972) dramatises Sir Edward Carson's impact on people across the sectarian divide in Belfast during 1912-14, *Stocker's Copper* (1972) depicts a 1913 tin mine strike in Cornwall, while the modernist *The Cheviot, The Stag and The Black, Black Oil* (1974) (*The Cheviot*) represents interconnected past and present injustices against the Scottish working-class. Fictional prose adaptations, such as John McGrath's earlier *Orkney* (1971) and Alan Garner's *Red Shift* (1978) feature three different time-zones, past and present. All of these examples are either set in the UK's Celtic fringe or made from Pebble Mill (see Chapter 4).

#### 2.4.5. Modernism

Like RAIDs, modernist PFTs represent a small, but significant, part of the strand's yield. McLoone sees modernism as a corrective to the 'mundane conservatism' of writers and directors using TV drama's staple naturalism. PFT's modernist pantheon unquestionably includes David Rudkin's *Penda's Fen* (1974), Dennis Potter's *Angels Are So Few* (1970), *Schmoedipus* (1974), *Double Dare* (1976) and *Blue Remembered Hills*, alongside John McGrath's *The Cheviot, The Adventures of Frank Part 1: Everybody's Fiddling Something* (1980) and *Part 2: Seeds Of Ice* (1980).<sup>112</sup> Certain comedies by Douglas Livingstone, Rhys Adrian and Caryl Churchill have modernist visual style, while there is an equally neglected range of absurdist PFTs by the dramatists N.F. Simpson, David Halliwell and Ron Hutchinson, alongside David Mercer's perplexing *The Bankrupt* (1972). Halliwell's *Steps Back* (1973) explores place and nostalgia with little dialogue; using voice-overs to convey its central couple's subjectivity.

To Gilbert's list of writers who experimented with TV form – Mercer, Potter, Adrian, Halliwell, Barry Bermange, Stephen Davis and Howard Schuman – Churchill, Simpson, McGrath and Philip Martin should be added.<sup>113</sup> While Potter can be situated among British TV's great modernist dramatists of 1974-78 alongside McGrath, Rudkin, Schuman and Martin, Potter's own critical antipathy towards Martin's *Gangsters* (1975; 1976-78) undermines the neatness of such a lineage.<sup>114</sup> In Kovács's definitions, John McGrath stands alone as an avant-garde activist, desiring to change everyday life; while PFT's other

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<sup>111</sup> In my essay on *Destiny*, I discuss how certain contemporary political figures were excised or retained when adapting Edgar's text for TV: May, T. (2017) 'An ideology red, white and blue in tooth and claw': David Edgar's *Destiny* (1978) – Part 3, **British Television Drama**, 2 Jun [online] Available at: <http://www.britishtelevisiondrama.org.uk/?p=7046> [accessed: 01/08/2022].

<sup>112</sup> Cooke, L. (2007) An Experiment in Television Drama: John McGrath's *The Adventures of Frank*, in: L. Mulvey & J. Sexton (eds.) *Experimental British Television*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 106-119.

<sup>113</sup> Gilbert op. cit. 18.

<sup>114</sup> Potter, D. (1978b) The great BBC balancing act, *Sunday Times*, 19 Feb, 35.

aforementioned modernist creators are not apolitical or oblivious to societal implications, they are more ‘experimental’ maverick artists, who refused to conform to realist forms.<sup>115</sup> While over half of PFTs in 1970-71 were in broadly non-naturalistic modes, including comedy, this output became a more minority ‘fringe’, especially after 1974. Subsequently, formally modernist work tended to be within serial narratives like Howard Schuman’s *Rock Follies* (1976-77), whose video experimentalism Seán Day-Lewis wisely perceived as a path that TV drama should have further explored.<sup>116</sup>

#### 2.4.6. PFT’s non-naturalistic ‘Lost Continent’

PFT’s non-naturalistic strain includes comedy, farce, fantasy, horror, science fiction and melodrama and is, adapting Julian Petley’s metaphor, a ‘long submerged lost continent’, in contrast to the strand’s critically-privileged social realism.<sup>117</sup> Several of these have an affinity with the fantastical strain of British cinema that critic and PFT writer David Pirie reappraises and contrasts with the ‘official’, journalistic ‘national cinema’ of Grierson and Loach.<sup>118</sup> In 1973, Pirie pioneered in seriously appraising Hammer horror films; alongside claiming visionary film director Michael Powell as part of his fantastical counter-tradition due to his distrust for documentary, noting how Powell’s career ‘was nearly destroyed in the uproar’ over *Peeping Tom* (1960) as, for many critics, its horror’s situation in a contemporary setting transgressed ‘the domain of the ‘real’’.<sup>119</sup> Pirie is critical of what he terms a ‘Tyranny of a real’ in British culture and his PFT *RDW* is novel in using horror tropes to relay its narrative of misogynistic violence and social breakdown in a Fenland village during the early phase of the Second World War.

In August-September 1965, in the run-up to series 2 of TWP, in its customary BBC1 time slot, was a short-lived spin-off entitled *The Wednesday Thriller* (TWT). This strand of eight standalone thrillers, all produced by Bernard Hepton, had a populist, fantastical flavour, even if the three existing WTs suggest that it was not especially thrilling nor bloodcurdling.<sup>120</sup> Hepton was to act in a key role in *Robin Redbreast* (1970), while TWT’s different remit from TWP was clear in its episodes having fixed 50-minute durations and in its mix of literary writers like William Trevor and Hugh Whitmore with mainstream cross-media writers like Peter Van Greenaway, Brian Hayles and Patricia Highsmith.

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<sup>115</sup> Kovács op. cit. 27-28.

<sup>116</sup> Day-Lewis op. cit. 208.

<sup>117</sup> Petley, J. (1986) *The lost continent*, in: C. Barr (ed.) *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema*. London: British Film Institute, 118.

<sup>118</sup> Pirie, D. (2008) *A New Heritage of Horror*, 2nd edn. London: I.B. Tauris, 11-12.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. 10.

<sup>120</sup> TWT’s fantastical associations are also suggested by Dudley Simpson – later a regular composer on *Doctor Who* (1963-89) – creating underscores for all episodes.

Some vivid, non-realist PFTs have become canonised. These include several recently pigeonholed as ‘folk horror’, which have been granted physical media releases: the unclassifiable, visionary and experimental *Penda’s Fen* and *Red Shift* and John Bowen’s diptych of eerie thrillers *Robin Redbreast* and *A Photograph* (1977). Dixie Williams’s highly original *Vampires* (1979) is fantasy-infused realism which focuses on schoolboys’ obsessions with horror fiction amid a social tableau of Catholic education and domestic violence in Liverpool. PFT’s small science fiction offering includes two *Dominick Hide* PFTs (1980-82) and the spin-off series *Play for Tomorrow* (1982), which followed PFT’s 1981-82 series in the same time slot.<sup>121</sup> These dystopian futurological imaginings, set in the near-future, shared PFT’s basis in issues; they included Caryl Churchill’s *Crimes*, which concluded with a piercing satire of civil defence preparations for nuclear war, performed by Dave Hill, and Michael Wilcox’s comedic *Cricket*, wherein members of a Northumberland cricket club conspire against unwelcome agricultural reforms.<sup>122</sup>

PFT included several comedies: alongside aforementioned plays by Adrian, Churchill, Halliwell, Hutchinson, Livingstone and Simpson, were Stephen Fagan’s incisive *Under the Hammer* (1984) and those by tonally varied writers Mike Stott, Charles Wood, Alan Bleasdale, Tony Bicat and Marcella Evaristi. Significantly, Peter Terson wrote the only PFT trilogy, centring on the trio of miners Art, Ern and Abe, who enjoy comedic excursions around the UK in *The Fishing Party* (1972), *Shakespeare or Bust!* (1973) and *Three for the Fancy* (1974). While Terson returned with the prosaic *Atlantis* (1983), he was supplanted from 1976-82 by Mike Leigh’s less gentle, improvised social satires *Nuts in May*, *The Kiss of Death*, *Abigail’s Party*, *Who’s Who* and *Home Sweet Home*.

Most overlooked are PFT’s uses of the mode of melodrama. The theatrical genre has been widely derided; historian Raphael Samuel perceives that melodrama and fantasy’s exclusion from the bourgeois theatre, linked with the gentrification of acting in the 1900s, has persisted in the dominance within British Left circles of ‘the documentary and the naturalistic’.<sup>123</sup> Kovács defines classical melodrama as conveying a subjective, emotional fatalism, representing an individual protagonist’s ‘passive experience before a great power’.<sup>124</sup> The adjective ‘melodramatic’ figures commonly as a pejorative in TV and film

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<sup>121</sup> Other series ‘spin-offs’ from original PFTs are *Gangsters* (1976-78), *Headmaster* (1977-78), *Rumpole of the Bailey* (1978-91) and *Scully* (1984). Together, these ran for a combined twelve series.

<sup>122</sup> *Crimes* is a brief prelude to Barry Hines’s shattering *Threads* (1984); it has a vastly smaller budget, but has more satirical humour, which Hill renders pitch-perfectly in his monologue.

<sup>123</sup> Samuel, R. (1985) *Theatre and socialism in Britain, (1880-1935)*, in: R. Samuel, E. MacColl & S. Cosgrove (eds.) *Theatres of the Left 1880-1935: Workers’ Theatre Movements in Britain and America*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 11.

<sup>124</sup> Kovács op. cit. 85-86.

criticism; specific PFTs like *The Lie* (1970) and *The Other Woman* (1976) were praised for *avoiding* melodrama.<sup>125</sup> However, Geraghty has argued that it is not soap operas' melodrama but the 'over-sensationalism' or didacticism of their storylines that should be criticised.<sup>126</sup> While Marion Jordan identifies *Coronation Street's* Soap-Opera Realism as revolving around the pleasures of nostalgia and its playfully caricatured women within a familial community, Charlotte Brunsdon discerns how *Crossroads* (1964-88) has 'strong affiliations with the overdrive of melodrama'.<sup>127</sup> PFTs in the melodramatic mode include William Trevor's *O Fat White Woman* (1971), a stark, clear-cut morality play depicting the abusive treatment of a child in a preparatory school, directed in modernist style by Philip Saville, and John McGrath's *The Bouncing Boy* (1972), a bluntly powerful melodramatic RAID against materialism and misogyny.<sup>128</sup> Others include Roger Smith's bizarre anti-capitalist exploitation film *The Operation* (1973), David Edgar's *Baby Love*, concerning a woman 'baby snatcher' and Stephen Fagan's *The Network* (1979), which has the virtuous Lyn Green (Cynthia Grenville) pursuing villainous doctors who run an illicit adoption agency. Edgar fuses Brechtian RAID elements with docudrama, his play being based on a true-life crime.<sup>129</sup> *The Bouncing Boy* is, in Kovács's terms, a modernist melodrama, which 'provokes emotional states' in the viewer by 'radically withdrawing representation of emotion': the absence of love in its fictional world echoes Antonioni's film *L'Eclisse* (*The Eclipse*) (1962), which presents 'the *dramatic* character of a situation which fundamentally lacks humanistic values'.<sup>130</sup>

## **2.5. Evaluation and textual analysis**

Having established PFT's main genres or modes, this Chapter will conduct evaluative quantitative and qualitative textual analysis of PFT. Textual analysis has its cultural roots in Philology and the 'Cambridge' school of literary criticism.<sup>131</sup> From 2000-10, several TV

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<sup>125</sup> Thomas, J. (1970b) This is marriage with the lid off! *Daily Express*, 30 Oct, 16; Say, R. (1976) Turnabout, *Sunday Telegraph*, 11 Jan, 15.

<sup>126</sup> Geraghty, C. (2003) Aesthetics and quality in popular television drama, *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, (6)1, 33-35.

<sup>127</sup> Jordan, M. (1981) Character Types and the Individual, in: Dyer, R. et al. *Coronation Street*. London: BFI Publishing, 27-40; Brunsdon, C. (1984) Writing About Soap Opera, in: L. Masterman (ed.) *Television Mythologies: Stars, Shows and Signs*. London: Comedia/MK Media Press, 86.

<sup>128</sup> See May, T. (2021b) Play for Today at 50: Part #2 – 'O Fat White Woman' (1971), Opening Negotiations, 4 Nov [online] Available at: <https://britishcoldwarculture.wordpress.com/2021/11/04/play-for-today-at-50-part-2-o-fat-white-woman-1971/> [accessed: 19/07/2022].

<sup>129</sup> May, T. (2020c) Play for Today: Baby Love, **Forgotten Television Drama**, 18 Aug [online] Available at: <https://forgottentelevisiondrama.wordpress.com/2020/08/18/play-for-today-baby-love/> [accessed: 02/08/2022]. Through Edgar's skilful writing and Patti Love's powerful performance, *Baby Love* avoids its protagonist Aileen becoming demonised or a relatable victim.

<sup>130</sup> Kovács op. cit. 87, 98.

<sup>131</sup> The Cambridge approach was pioneered in 1924-30 by I.A. Richards and William Empson and subsequently epitomised by the journal F.R. Leavis founded with L.C. Knights, *Scrutiny* (1932-53), which had a significant influence on English Literature as a discipline after the Second World War.

academics argued for retaining value judgments against a perceived tide of liberal and New Left ‘relativism’. Simon Frith, Jason Jacobs, Christine Geraghty, Sarah Cardwell and Jeremy G. Butler have all critiqued the representational focus of much analysis in television studies, which forsakes close aesthetic analysis of TV texts, instead using them as vehicles to explore ideological or identity issues.<sup>132</sup> Echoing Caughie’s point about PFT being, however tenuously, ‘a central component of the national culture’, Frith notes that TV is more of a service or utility than a collection of specific programmes and, in its temporal nature, it is closer to ‘news’ than to ‘art’; thus, habitual viewing makes audiences part of a public or society.<sup>133</sup> While Frith seems to privilege the journalistic *real* evoked by PFT’s polemical RAID sub-genre over Taylor’s discursive, timeless works of *art*, both types of PFTs can be evaluated fairly using his criteria: ‘freshness, imagination, authenticity, education, truth, social relevance, expressive richness, integrity’.<sup>134</sup>

This thesis’ analyses of PFT build on Jason Jacobs’s claim that TV is a ‘popular art’ equivalent to literature, film and art, rejecting Leavisite ideas of a hierarchy of forms.<sup>135</sup> Echoing Jason Jacobs, Christine Geraghty sees ‘emotional ‘plausibility’ as just as important as ‘innovation’ in drama.<sup>136</sup> In proposing evaluation of TV, Geraghty echoes Dennis Potter’s claim that ‘The single play is one of the last areas of television where the irritating cadences of the individual voice can still be heard’, in arguing that attention needs paying to writers’ distinctive voices and also the tone actors use in their delivery.<sup>137</sup> This chapter’s analysis of Average Shot Lengths fuses empirical attention to PFT texts with

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<sup>132</sup> Frith, S. (2000) The black box: the value of television and the future of television research, *Screen*, (41)1, Spring, 33-50; Jacobs, J. (2001) Issues of judgement and value in television studies, *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, (4)4, 427-447; Geraghty (2003) op. cit. 25-45; Cardwell, S. (2006) Television Aesthetics, *Critical Studies in Television*, (1)1, 72-80; Butler, J.G. (2010) *Television Style*. London: Routledge. Geraghty and Butler associate this tradition with French theorists Bourdieu and Foucault; Geraghty claims that relativists’ idea that to make value judgements ‘was to impose the cultural norms of the powerful’ has been used against programmes which aspire to cultural value – arts, history or classic serial dramas – and is ‘ideological’ in its simplistic value judgement in favour of ‘low’ programming: Butler 16, Geraghty 28.

<sup>133</sup> Caughie op. cit. 194. Frith *ibid.* 48. Caughie claims that PFT was project in which ‘controversy was ‘talked up’ by producers in a way which made it seem like a ‘responsibility’. Tony Garnett’s agent Clive Goodwin and producer Kenith Trodd discussed their battles with BBC bosses as the climate became more restrictive in 1975-78. Goodwin, C. (1977) Censorship and Drama 1, *Broadcast*, 22 Aug, 37-40; Trodd, K. (1978) Blue Pencil and Scissor Show, *Broadcast*, 18 Sep, 17-21.

<sup>134</sup> Frith *ibid.* 45. Via Jay Blumler and Tim Leggatt, Frith’s criteria for assessing the quality of television were endorsed by professionals interviewed by Leggatt.

<sup>135</sup> Jacobs op. cit. 428. The phrase ‘popular art’ was used in Hall and Whannel’s seminal cultural studies work. They were influenced by Leavis, but moved beyond his antipathy to pluralism and popular culture. For evidence of Leavis’s prejudices, see: Leavis, F.R. (1972) *Nor Shall My Sword: Discourses on Pluralism, Compassion and Social Hope*. London: Chatto & Windus, 184, 189.

<sup>136</sup> Geraghty (2003) op. cit. 34-35; Jacobs op. cit. 437.

<sup>137</sup> Geraghty *ibid.* 33-36; Potter, D. (1973) Follow the Yellow Brick Road – Preface, in: R. Muller (ed.) (1973) *The Television Dramatist*. London: Paul Elek, 305. Geraghty claims that acting is academically neglected, other than in instances like Christine Gledhill’s exemplary stylistic analysis of a summer 1995 *EastEnders* scene in: Gledhill, C. (1997) Genre and Gender: The Case of Soap Opera, in: S. Hall (ed.) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage Publications Inc., 342;

qualitative analysis which is rooted in socio-historical interpretation; thus, achieving James Zborowski's suggestion of combining the rigorous attention to detail urged by the aforementioned TV aestheticians with enriching contextual analysis of how texts represent the world.<sup>138</sup> This Chapter's historical analysis of PFT will fulfil Butler's call for TV scholars to adapt Bordwell and Salt's film-centric analyses of directorial style including *mise-en-scène*, technology, aesthetics and Average Shot Lengths (ASL) to TV texts, while also analysing acting styles and the use – or otherwise – of musical underscores.<sup>139</sup> Analysing these vital components of televisual style will illuminate how different PFTs appealed to their viewers.

## **2.6. Uses of sound and music in PFT**

The following analysis will indicate that PFT used musical underscores sparingly, often preferring to use non-diegetic music or sounds for verisimilar or specific narrative effects. It will show how PFT *generally* aligned itself with restrained theatrical and European art cinema styles over Hollywood's manipulation of spectators' emotions. Kevin Donnelly claims that musical underscores establish and guide geographical and social ideas for the audience, referring to Theodor Adorno's view that music forms social consciousness, and director Jean-Luc Godard's opinion that all music in films is manipulative.<sup>140</sup> Composer Stephen Deutsch argues that, 'most films have too much music', noting acerbically how lesser quality action movies use 'big sounds' to provide an 'adrenalin push'.<sup>141</sup> Deutsch admires the filmmaker Michael Haneke for his disciplined avoidance of underscores, while occasionally using diegetic music, and notes how the climactic chase sequence in the thriller *The French Connection* (1971) contains no underscore.<sup>142</sup> Jeremy G. Butler has highlighted how John Ellis sees TV's invocatory soundtracks as demanding the viewer's attention, directing them away from the 'poverty' of television's images.<sup>143</sup>

Producer Richard Eyre recalls that PFT's directors would usually decide whether an underscore would be used, but that tight budgets dictated that they could only afford three-hour sessions – which would produce 15 minutes' worth of underscore – and that only individual or small groups of musicians could be used; ruling out orchestras.<sup>144</sup> Two PFT

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<sup>138</sup> Zborowski, J. (2016) Television aesthetics, media and cultural studies and the contested realm of the social, *Critical Studies in Television*, (11)1, 7-22.

<sup>139</sup> Butler op. cit. 2, 6, 10.

<sup>140</sup> Donnelly, K.J. (2005) *The Spectre of Sound: Music in Film and Television*. London: British Film Institute. 4-5, 55.

<sup>141</sup> Deutsch, S. (2021) Interview with author, 23 Mar.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Butler op. cit. 96-97.

<sup>144</sup> Eyre (2020) op. cit. Such economies may partly explain why underscores, even within the minority of PFTs which do have them, feature so sparsely.

underscore composers, Dave Greenslade and Nick Bicât, express appreciation for how producers David Rose, Tara Prem and Richard Eyre – and various directors – granted them creative freedom, trusting them to serve the story; Greenslade enjoyed using his Yamaha CS-60, Prophet 5 and Roland synthesisers to interpret Philip Martin’s *Gangsters* scripts, while Bicât especially enjoyed ‘playing with the levels of irony’ that *A Cotswold Death* (1982) exploited.<sup>145</sup> Producers Prem and Eyre both employed Bicât having worked with him previously, but PFT occasionally used library music: *The Death of a Young Young Man* (1975) has a plangent and wistful guitar-led score by composers Lamont, Hicks and Richmond, whereas Kenith Trodd recalls utilising the BBC library for harmonica music used in *The Last Window Cleaner* (1979).<sup>146</sup> Director John Goldschmidt bluntly explains that he felt *Speech Day* and *Spend, Spend, Spend* did not *need* underscores, just occasional appropriate ‘source music’ that would, unlike the aforementioned examples, be diegetic.<sup>147</sup>

Donnelly claims that Alan Clarke’s feature-film of Andrea Dunbar’s stage-play *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1986) belongs to the tradition of PFT and, unlike most feature films, has a ‘minimal amount of music’.<sup>148</sup> Musicologist Philip Tagg associates the absence of composed underscores in European realist cinema of the 1950s onwards and in all soap operas with realism; for the former, this was partly deliberate differentiation from Hollywood.<sup>149</sup> In PFT, commissioned incidental music and in-house sound effects tended to be the exception: according to credits in the *Radio Times* and my careful viewing and listening, just 84 PFTs – 28.9% of the total – have a musical underscore composer, other credited musical input, or contributions from the BBC Radiophonic Workshop.<sup>150</sup> 71.1% of PFTs have none of these. The all-filmed *A Story to Frighten the Children* and *Kate The Good Neighbour* (1980), the all-videoed *Gotcha* (1977) or *Comedians* (1979), and video-led hybrids *Robin Redbreast* and *No Visible Scar* (1981) all forsake non-diegetic soundtracks and typify PFT’s refusal to manipulate the viewer via signposting their emotional responses.<sup>151</sup>

This asceticism chimes with Don Taylor’s discursive VS style, *and* with Ken Loach’s journalistic FL realism, which was informed by austere European cinematic forerunners.

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<sup>145</sup> Greenslade, D. (2021) Interview with author, 27 May; Bicât, N. (2020) Email to author, 11 Jun.

<sup>146</sup> Prem op. cit.; Eyre op. cit.; Trodd (2020) op. cit.

<sup>147</sup> Goldschmidt, J. (2020) Interview with author, 22 May.

<sup>148</sup> Donnelly op. cit. 133. Clarke’s film was later shown as part of Film on Four’s tenth TV run in May 1990.

<sup>149</sup> Tagg, P. (2000) *KOJAK: Fifty Seconds of Television Music: Towards the Analysis of Affect in Popular Music*. New York: Mass Media Music Scholars’ Press, 89-91.

<sup>150</sup> 51% of all-filmed PFTs have underscores. This compares with only 17.3% of video, or primarily video, PFTs which do.

<sup>151</sup> The all-filmed *A Passage to England* (1975) has a sparse, uncredited underscore, in which an ominous vibraphone is used to suspenseful and ironic effect.

Loach used diegetic pop music in *UTJ* (1965) and *Cathy* (1966), to create verisimilitude, rather than manipulate viewers via non-diegetic underscores.<sup>152</sup> Indeed, PFT's aural schema generally seems closer to that of 'slow cinema' which, with its 'ambient noises or field recordings', Sukhdev Sandhu contrasts to Hollywood's bombastic sound design.<sup>153</sup> In a range of PFTs set in the industrial Midlands and North – including *The Piano* (1971), *The Pigeon Fancier* (1971), *KAF*, *Steps Back*, *Shutdown* (1973), *The Spongers* and *Chance of a Lifetime* (1980) – the sparseness of their soundtracks reflects a slow cinema-like attention to 'landscapes and local customs', as opposed to any generic conventions.<sup>154</sup>

Donnelly notes that some TV drama music closely resembles film or radio drama underscores, in contrast to the absence of music in soap opera.<sup>155</sup> He identifies popular series which economically re-used musical blocks – *The Avengers*, *The Sweeney* (1975-78), *Twin Peaks* (1990-91) – to the extent that these pieces became familiar presences in their programmes. Contrastingly, music in PFT is barely ever repeated, except in the opening title sequences – with the exception of Sidney Sagar's theme for Peter Terson's Art-Abe-Ern trilogy. Instead of being synonymous *with* PFT, diegetic sound effects, source music or non-diegetic underscores are used to convey varied moods within *specific* PFTs.<sup>156</sup>

13 PFTs featured specially recorded music or sound effects from the in-house BBC Radiophonic Workshop, mostly uncredited, while, in 1971-73, the strand's musical ident were composed by the Workshop's Delia Derbyshire and Malcolm Clarke (see Appendix 4).<sup>157</sup> PFT's most extensive use of the Workshop was from 1970-74, when eight contributions were used in comparison to just five from 1974-84. Latterly, with the exception of *A Hole in Babylon* – for which Brian Hodgson composed in March 1979 – and *The Cry* (Dick Mills, March 1984), PFT used the Workshop to soundtrack science fiction – the *Dominick Hide* diptych – Tom McGrath's dystopian Play for Tomorrow *The Nuclear Family* and Dennis Potter's modernist *Double Dare*.<sup>158</sup> In Potter's *Angels Are So Few*, Malcolm Clarke's diegetic sound effects include a shrill, piercing sound to evoke the

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<sup>152</sup> Donnelly notes that Ben E. King's 'Stand by Me' (1961) is used in the latter, being recognisable to viewers as a relatively recent hit in the UK Singles Chart.

<sup>153</sup> Sandhu, S.S. (2012) 'Slow cinema' fights back against Bourne's supremacy, *Guardian*, 9 Mar [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/mar/09/slow-cinema-fights-bournes-supremacy> [accessed: 31/03/2020].

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Donnelly op. cit. 122.

<sup>156</sup> See Tagg op. cit. 96.

<sup>157</sup> BBC Radiophonic Workshop Catalogue. BBC WAC, R97/27 [accessed: 15/01/2020]. This figure excludes Paddy Kingsland's uncredited sounds for *Access to the Children* (1973) and Dick Mills's sounds for *Brimstone and Treacle*.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

angel Michael Biddle's (Tom Bell) use of his supernatural powers to kill a postman by upending his car – which then blends into the everyday, domestic sound of Cynthia's (Christine Hargreaves) kettle coming to the boil in an equally shrill timbre.

Musical underscores initially became less prevalent: in 21 PFTs in series 1, there were eight credited underscores or Radiophonic Workshop contributions (38%), compared with series 7, where there were only three in 17 plays (18%). However, commissioned soundtracks surged in series 15, when eight out of 15 PFTs had them (53%).

More PFTs had underscores commissioned from recognised freelance screen composers. Carl Davis, composer of PFT's 1973-77 idents, also created underscores for nine PFTs – six of which were for filmed PFTs – from *The Right Prospectus* (1970) to *Home Sweet Home* (1982).<sup>159</sup> Only five other composers were used thrice or more: Nick Bicât (1979-82: 5); Marc Wilkinson (1970-84: 3); Herbert Chappell (1971-76: 3); Sidney Sagar (1972-74: 3) and Stanley Myers (1973-84: 3). Other seasoned TV and film soundtrack composers were used, like Joseph Horovitz (1972: 1); John Addison (1974: 1); Shaun Davey (1977: 1); Mark Brown (1980: 2); Jim Parker (1982-84: 2) and Geoffrey Burgon (1982-84: 2), well-known as composer for prestigious literary adaptations *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* and *Brideshead Revisited*.<sup>160</sup> PFT's only freelance female composer of underscores was the Blackpool-born Iona Sekacz, who contributed twice in 1980.<sup>161</sup> Andy Roberts's underscore for *The After Dinner Joke* (1978) contains musical parodies and lightweight synthesiser sounds in comparison to the Radiophonic Workshop's earlier cutting-edge uses of tape manipulation and the EMS Synthi. Scores by Richard Holmes for *The Piano* and George Fenton for *Chance of a Lifetime* share a wistful Northern atmosphere.

Significant outliers include the Lancastrian folk band The Oldham Tinkers who wrote dry, pessimistic non-diegetic songs for the 1973-74 PFTs *KAF* and *The Lonely Man's Lover*. Similarly, the Hull folk-rock group The Watsons were credited for their work on *Land of Green Ginger* (1973) and they appear on screen playing in a pub. Jazz was more peripheral, featuring primarily via Mike Westbrook, a prolific and innovative musician who underscored Adrian Mitchell's Defoe-inspired *Man Friday* (1972).<sup>162</sup> See Chapter 5

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<sup>159</sup> Davis recalls doing improvised music for the motorcycle sequences in the now-lost *Hell's Angel* (1971): Davis, C. (2020) Interview with author, 4 Jun.

<sup>160</sup> Parker composed the quintessentially English musical settings for four LP releases of Poet Laureate Sir John Betjeman's poems (1974-81).

<sup>161</sup> Sekacz later composed incidental music for *Boys from the Blackstuff* (1982). Norma and Lal Waterson were pivotal members of The Watsons. Thus, the three freelance women with noted musical contributions were all northern.

<sup>162</sup> Mitchell's play was made into a film in 1975 by a PFT director Jack Gold; notably, Gold enlisted Carl Davis for its underscore, a more mainstream figure than Westbrook.

and Appendix 6 for discussion of diegetic and non-diegetic uses of reggae music in three 1972-79 PFTs. Prog-Rock musician Dave Greenslade's music featured twice (1975-80), while there was other pop-rock music by Stephen Deutsch, who composed songs for Robin Chapman's two PFTs (1976-77) and Rick James and David Pierce, who wrote songs for the *Dominick Hide* diptych in 1980-82. Prominent musicians to appear on screen in PFT include Ray Davies as *The Long Distance Piano Player* (1970), Tina Charles as a singer in Arthur Hopcraft's *Jingle Bells* (1973), Frankie Miller as a lead in *Just A Boys' Game* (1979) and the bands Gonzalez and Fashion in *Early Struggles* (1976) and *3 Minute Heroes* (1982), respectively. In PFT's second half, and especially noticeably in 1982-84, a range of mainly videoed plays followed *UTJ* in using extensive diegetic popular music for verisimilar effect – including *A Sudden Wrench*, *Last Love*, *Shall I Be Mother?*, *Moving on the Edge* and *Hard Feelings*.<sup>163</sup>

Several PFTs, including *Eleanor* (1974), *Doran's Box* (1976) and *RDW* (1984), contain sound design whereby we hear aeroplanes flying overhead. In all three, this sound assails troubled protagonists: in the former pair naturalistically to indicate the presence of airfields, whose noise symbolises the disaffection of Eleanor and Doran within their modern environments. Neither of the earlier plays contain underscores; the latter uses Stanley Myers's horror-inflected modern classical music, which, alongside the aeroplane sounds – flashbacks in Truman's mind to Dunkirk – convey non-naturalistically his experiences of shellshock.

While Chapter 3 will analyse press criticism of PFT in depth, it is worth highlighting specific critical discourses concerning sound in PFT. Whereas David Hughes called *A Photograph* (1977) a 'finely tuned Play for Today', few press critics paid detailed attention to the strand's sound, music, costume or lighting.<sup>164</sup> Implicitly, reviewers may have felt that good writing and acting obviated the need for musical underscoring. Tellingly, Matthew Coady highlighted how many films or TV dramas would too easily 'reproduce [...] Northern surface realism [...] let him [the viewer] hear the sound of a brass band, and he knows in an instant, exactly where he is supposed to be'.<sup>165</sup> Coady admires Julia Jones's *The Piano* for revealing 'inner realities' behind surfaces, with the director James Cellan-Jones avoiding manipulative auditory telegraphing.<sup>166</sup> Nancy Banks-Smith and Peter Black

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<sup>163</sup> Others, like *Jude* (1980) and *Reluctant Chickens* (1983), used classical music to delineate middle-class environments.

<sup>164</sup> Hughes, D. (1977) The way we live now, *Sunday Times*, 27 Mar, 37.

<sup>165</sup> Coady, M. (1971) Discord of an old piano, *Daily Mirror*, 29 Jan, 14.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

noted music's symbolic presence in Jones's play; like Coady, they implicitly approved of the production's own absence of music.<sup>167</sup>

Occasionally, PFT's general lack of aural stimulus was seen negatively. Philip Barker criticised *The Long Distance Piano Player* (1970) for its 'punitive dialogue of the irritating repetitive, significant silence, non-sequitur kind', ignoring its Ray Davies songs. Similarly eliding Carl Davis's wry underscore, Banks-Smith jokes that Mike Leigh's *The Kiss of Death* (1977), with its taciturn characters, has taught her that a 'pregnant silence [...] lasts a full nine months'.<sup>168</sup> For Maureen Paton, 'the sound of silence was practically deafening' in *Moving on the Edge* (1984); Paton found this narrative of Eleanor Bron's character 'going quietly potty' tedious and lacking in the witty humour she expected of Bron.<sup>169</sup>

In reviews consulted, no critics mention the strand's musical idents (see Appendix 4 for an extended analysis of these). Occasionally, critics liked underscores: Philip Purser found Davis's flute-led music for *The Right Prospectus* (1970) 'lilting', Geoffrey Wren regarded John Addison's similarly classicist rural-signifying music as 'evocative', Bernard Davies saw Delia Derbyshire's radiophonic underscore for *O Fat White Woman* (1971) as 'remarkable', while Peter Fiddick appraised Davis's music for *Your Man from Six Counties* (1976) as a 'fine, edgy score'.<sup>170</sup> While, as mentioned, more 1984 PFTs deployed underscores, Marc Wilkinson and Jim Parker's music for *Young Shoulders* and *Dog Ends* was ignored by critics. Those critics who mentioned music tended to be negative: Julian Barnes analogises Geoffrey Burgon's 'hefty background music' in *Z for Zachariah* to its 'hefty pages of preposterous dialogue', while Hilary Kingsley and Benny Green disliked the 'irritating', 'jackass braying' of Leonard Preston's songs for *The Groundling and the Kite* – though the former enjoyed the play for its refreshingly different representations of gay men.<sup>171</sup> John Wyver's was the sole voice of praise for a late PFT underscore, calling Stanley Myers's music for *RDW* 'terrific'.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Banks-Smith, N. (1971) THE PIANO on television, *Guardian*, 29 Jan, 8; Black, P. (1971b) A concerto for piano and North Country idiom, *Daily Mail*, 29 Jan, 3.

<sup>168</sup> Banks-Smith, N. (1977a) Kiss of Death, *Guardian*, 12 Jan, 8.

<sup>169</sup> Paton, M. (1984b) Crazy waste of a funny lady, *Daily Express*, 7 Mar, 27.

<sup>170</sup> Purser, P. (1970b) Back to Play School, *Sunday Telegraph*, 25 Oct, 21; Wren, G. (1974) The performance of her life, *Television Today*, 21 Nov, 19; Davies, B. (1971: 18); Fiddick, P. (1976) Television: Colin Welland, *Guardian*, 27 Oct, 12. Unlike Wren, Sylvia Clayton found Addison's score too 'strident [...] unnecessary and inappropriate to a drama played out in silence and seclusion': Clayton, S. (1974) Vivid scenery aid to drama of solitude, *Daily Telegraph*, 15 Nov, 14.

<sup>171</sup> Barnes, J. (1984a) Close to the heart of evil, *Observer*, 4 Mar, 24; Kingsley, H. (1984b) Lifted by the Kite, *Daily Mirror*, 25 Jul, 19; Green, B. (1984) Games for a Laugh, *Punch*, 1 Aug, 58. Barnes's comment is odd, as dialogue is sparse in *ZFZ*; in its first 26 minutes, diegetic sounds and Burgon's music dominate.

<sup>172</sup> Wyver, J. (1984) An unfamiliar England, *Listener*, 5 Apr, 33.

## **2.7. PFT's editing speeds and Average Shot Lengths**

This section will carry out an original historical analysis of Average Shot Lengths (ASL) in PFT, building on the work of Barry Salt and David Bordwell in film studies and Jeremy G. Butler in television studies. Of 294 PFTs, 194 (66%) were mostly or totally shot on video, while 100 (34%) were shot all on film, primarily on location (see Appendix 5 for a detailed account of this). It is often *assumed* that the VS aesthetic was slower in its editing; this is quantitatively measured via Average Shot Lengths. My dataset demonstrates that PFT's video output was somewhat slower cut than its filmed yield, with both aesthetics showing a notable historical deceleration in editing pace which diverged from feature-films in 1978-84. I will also reveal that video-led hybrids incorporating filmed inserts were PFT's primary aesthetic, while specific filmed PFT styles included pacey regional populism and a sedate Brechtian documentarian gaze, and that women writers' PFTs tended to be slower cut to emphasise conversations over action.

BBC Head of Plays Gerald Savory (1966-72) valued the VS aesthetic for its cost-efficiency. His edict to staff read: 'we are not making films [...] editing must be kept down.'<sup>173</sup> This implies that, following on from earlier live TV drama, there were fewer cuts in VS productions and slower ASLs. However, the multi-camera set-up could enable very brisk cutting. While Ken Loach's seminal *UTJ*'s filmed sequences have an ASL of 8.8 to the video sequences' ASL of 10.1, David Mercer's wholly-videoed *Let's Murder Vivaldi* (1968) is rapidly cut by director Alan Bridges, having an ASL of 5.77.<sup>174</sup>

David Hare called videotape 'the hopeless hybrid', lying in between theatre and film, 'recorded in slabs with unwieldy machinery', lacking in 'visual finesse, against sets which have no stylistic density or texture, and lit from a grid which is too high and too crude'.<sup>175</sup> Leah Panos counter-argues that the studio was ideally suited to construct critical dramas like Trevor Griffiths's *All Good Men* (1974), capturing the subtleties of actors' performances within alienated studio spaces.<sup>176</sup> In analysing Alan Bennett's Talking Heads monologue 'Bed Among the Lentils' (1988) (hereafter 'Bed'), Albert Hunt noted how writer-director Bennett had returned to and developed a 'slow' aesthetic associated with the technologically determined days of live TV drama. In terms of Maggie Smith's performance:

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<sup>173</sup> Drama memo from Gerald Savory, 5 Feb 1968, quoted in: Forster op. cit. 85.

<sup>174</sup> 52.6% of *UTJ*'s duration was filmed on the London streets, to 47.4% on video at Television Centre. An earlier, historical WP *Mr Douglas* (1964) has film inserts which only constitute 2.8% of its duration, yet these are much faster cut, having an ASL of 4.3 to the VS sequences' 9.6.

<sup>175</sup> Hare (1982) op. cit. 47-48.

<sup>176</sup> Panos (2010) op. cit.; Panos (2013) op. cit. 165.

[T]he tension between the fixed word (fixed in the past by a writer who has carefully composed it) and the recreation of that word in a present scrutinised by a camera from which it is impossible to hide creates something of the excitement of a sporting event televised live. The performer walking on the tightrope offers the possibility of falling off.<sup>177</sup>

Hunt sees Bennett's style as inherently televisual in its immediacy and how it gives primacy to the actor's performance of scripted words. 'Bed', produced by Innes Lloyd, contains only 12 shots; Hunt notes that the last scene is one long take of eleven and a half minutes.<sup>178</sup> This tendency is echoed in critics' advocacy of 'Slow cinema', variously as a refuge from capitalist work time, the pace of modern life or Hollywood cinema's rapidity.<sup>179</sup> Thomas Elsaesser claims that slow cinema has

re-formulated the old opposition between avant-garde cinema and mainstream narrative cinema around (the absence of speed) [it] counters the blockbuster's over-investment in physical action, spectacle and violence with long takes, quiet observation, an attention to detail, to inner stirrings rather than to outward restlessness.<sup>180</sup>

Sukhdev Sandhu echoes Elsaesser's account of slow cinema's meditative pace, juxtaposing it with rapid-paced 'popcorn' blockbusters like *Die Hard* (1988) and *Godzilla* (1997), while Jonathan Romney claims it 'downplays event in favour of mood and reflexively encourages critical viewing'.<sup>181</sup> Certain other PFT figures have been associated with a measured style. Writer Stephen Poliakoff was praised with interlinked discourses of 'slowness' and 'quality' in a 2006 *Time Shift* documentary; John Hill has compared director Ken Loach's mid-late 1970s work to slow cinema based on its 'patient observation of the ordinary and undramatic'.<sup>182</sup>

While not the sole measure of films or TV programmes' speed, editing pace is a significant contributor.<sup>183</sup> In cinema history, Barry Salt has suggested that 'fast' and 'cinematic' are not *necessarily* synonymous; neither has editing pace *always* increased. The 1920s saw faster editing than the 1910s, but the cumulative ASL of Salt's shot-logged films increases during 1930-59 from 8.8 to 10.2 – including the era of 'Classical Hollywood' (1940-50).

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<sup>177</sup> Hunt (1993) op. cit. 37.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid. 33. Lloyd's first and last of his 17 PFT productions were of Alan Bennett scripts.

<sup>179</sup> Elsaesser, T. (2011) Stop/Motion: The Museum and the Moving Image: A Marriage Made at the documenta?, in: E. Røssaak (ed.) *Between Stillness and Motion: Film, Photography, Algorithms*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 116-117; Sandhu, S.S. (2004) Supersize cinema, *New Statesman*, 11 Oct, 50-51. See also: Sandhu (2012) op. cit.; Romney, J. (2010) In Search of Lost Time, *Sight and Sound*, 1 Feb, 43-44. The earliest usage I have located of 'slow cinema' is in an article about children's response to static slide-based films shown in the Soviet Union: Solev, V. (1936-37) Educational Films in the U.S.S.R., *Sight and Sound*, Winter, 156-157.

<sup>180</sup> Elsaesser *ibid*.

<sup>181</sup> Sandhu (2004) op. cit; Romney op. cit.

<sup>182</sup> *Stephen Poliakoff – a Brief History of Now* (2006); Hill, J. (2011) *Ken Loach: The Politics of Film and Television*. London: British Film Institute, 30. Poliakoff, Bennett and Hare are the three PFT veteran writers with the newest TV works broadcast: *Summer of Rockets* (2019), *Talking Heads* (2020) and *Roadkill* (2020).

<sup>183</sup> Pacing is also affected by camera and actor movement and overlapping dialogue: Bordwell op. cit. 169-173.

However, by 1983, Salt discerns a definite trend in feature-films towards faster pacing: ‘ASLs of four seconds or less are now fairly common, and hardly any ordinary commercial films have ASLs longer than nine seconds’.<sup>184</sup> Salt’s subsequent online data shows that feature-films’ ASLs have decreased in every decade from the 1960s-2000s.<sup>185</sup> Salt notes the importance of the long take to Cinéma vérité and Direct Cinema, while also associating the slow-cutting of auteur-directors of the 1970s with artistic ambitions: ‘the higher the pretensions, the longer the take’.<sup>186</sup> The Salt-Bordwell paradigm is that European art cinema is slow, while Hollywood is fast.

The binary assumption that film is fast and video is slow needs deeper examination. Adding to his reasons for preferring film over video, the writer-director David Hare claimed that ‘film is fast’ and that video-tape, ‘with inferior editing techniques, lingers’.<sup>187</sup> This is true of Sergei Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) or any Michael Bay action film; Barry Salt’s data reveals how a European art film like Éric Rohmer’s *Claire’s Knee* (1970) has an ASL of 23.9, while a Hollywood action film like James Cameron’s *The Terminator* (1984) has an ASL of 3.1. However, Hannah Andrews points out the more complicated picture: Hare’s own filmed PFT *Licking Hitler* has a stately ASL of 11.1, compared with Mike Leigh’s filmed *Nuts in May*, which has an ASL of 8.4.<sup>188</sup> Also, on a *practical* level, multi-camera video recordings in the studio were much faster and more cost effective in using time and resources: two or three evenings would suffice to record most VS PFTs, whereas FL PFTs tended to require shoots of three to six weeks.

Some VS TV dramas have deliberately opted for slow pacing: Alan Bennett’s aforementioned ‘Bed’ has an ASL of 238. As Albert Hunt and Lez Cooke have argued, the sedateness of ‘Bed’ suits the drama’s human intimacy, with director Bennett’s camera’s slow and almost imperceptible movements capturing the nuances of Maggie Smith’s real-time performance. Other less extreme, but marked, instances of slow TV drama include many theatre adaptations. For example, Jack Gold’s all-VS BBC Television Shakespeare version of *The Merchant of Venice* (1980) has an ASL of 31.4; Jonathan Bignell has highlighted that TV adaptations of Samuel Beckett’s plays tend to be slowly edited.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Salt, B. (1983) *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis*. London: Starword, 349.

<sup>185</sup> This data is taken from Salt’s online database of 10,915 films from 1911-2014: Salt, B. (2022) Barry Salt’s Database, **Cinematics Database** [online] Available at: <http://www.cinematics.lv/satldb.php#asl> [accessed: 07/01/2020]. By 2009, the cumulative ASL of Salt’s sample of film history was 7.8.

<sup>186</sup> Salt (1983) op. cit. 291, 349.

<sup>187</sup> Hare op. cit. 47-48.

<sup>188</sup> Andrews (2014) op. cit. 53.

<sup>189</sup> Bignell, J. (2022) Screen and stage space in Beckett’s theatre plays on television, in: A. Wrigley & J. Wyver (eds.) *Screen Plays: Theatre plays on British Television*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 226-245.

The editing pacing of British TV drama has increased, as discerned by Lez Cooke.<sup>190</sup> A sample of 19 episodes from *Doctor Who*'s original run shows an ASL of 9.35, with a quickening over time: the fastest ASLs are for episodes directed by Alan Bromly (6.59 in 1973), Graeme Harper (5.38 in 1985) and Michael Kerrigan (5.21 in 1989).<sup>191</sup> Notably, the three slowest episodes were directed by people who also worked on TWP-PfT: Waris Hussein (10.53 in 1963), an uncredited John Gorrie (22.23 in 1964) and David Maloney (10.53 in 1969).<sup>192</sup> The BBC's import and ratings success *Dallas* (1978-91) has ASLs of between 6-7 seconds.<sup>193</sup> Bordwell notes that this sort of ASL now seems comparatively sedate: emphasising how dominant fast-cutting has become in the age of intensified continuity and easier, less costly computer editing.<sup>194</sup> The trend of faster editing continues today: the exceptionally kinetic first episode of *I May Destroy You* (2020) is also cut rapidly, with an ASL of just under 3.

To test the hypothesis that video would be slower and film faster, I identified a sample of 75 PfTs, 25% of the total. This sample is a scale-model proportionate to the numbers per series, and the amount that were video and film productions: 25 all-film and 50 all-video or video-led PfTs. Shot-logging was conducted via Jeremy G. Butler's instructions in using VLC Player, which I conducted for the sample from October 2019 to April 2022 (see Appendix 3 for the full dataset).

**Table 2.2. ASLs of film and video shots in Play for Today**

Aesthetic	Seconds (proportion of sample)	Shots	ASL (mean average)
<b>Film</b>	130,405 (41.62%)	15,585	<b>8.37</b>
<b>Video</b>	182,900 (58.38%)	19,200	<b>9.53</b>
<b><u>OVERALL</u></b>	<b><u>313,305</u></b>	<b><u>34,785</u></b>	<b><u>9.01</u></b>

<sup>190</sup> Cooke (2015) op. cit. 15, 188, 199.

<sup>191</sup> This sample is a combination of six ASLs specified by Ian Potter, four in Salt's Cinematics database and nine I have shot-logged. Potter, I. (2007) The Filipino army's advance on Reykjavik: world-building in Studio D and its legacy, in: D. Butler (ed.) *Time and Relative Dissertations in Space: Critical Perspectives on Doctor Who*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 168-169, 174.

<sup>192</sup> In contrast, a 1976 episode directed by the more action-orientated Douglas Camfield – who helmed an unofficial PfT – had an ASL of 7.71. In 1982-85, Peter Moffatt was a comparative throwback to the 1960s with several leisurely ASLs just under 10.

<sup>193</sup> Salt (2022) op. cit.; Butler, J.G. (2022) Summary Data Table, **ShotLogger V2.0** [online] Available at: <https://shotlogger.org/data.php> [accessed: 31/01/2020].

<sup>194</sup> Bordwell op. cit. 155.

Table 2.2 records a slight but tangible difference, with filmed shots being cut 1.16 seconds faster. Material shot on video on OB forms a smaller proportion of 5.2% of the sample; while too small an amount to draw definite conclusions, OB PFTs' ASL seems slow at 10.1. However, Hare's claim that video was intrinsically slower is overly sweeping.

As previously explained, many ostensibly video PFTs included filmed inserts: in fact, 32 of the 'video' 50 in my sample were video-led hybrids, whose mean average duration of filmed shots constituted 20.9% of the total. Thus, while video was the mainstay, film was regularly used to embellish and open out PFTs with a primarily video aesthetic. This hybrid form is the neglected mainstay of PFT; directors such as Michael Apted, Giles Foster and Richard Wilson used it shrewdly – though producer Richard Eyre regards *Cries from a Watchtower* (1979) as 'an uncomfortable hybrid'.<sup>195</sup> Generally, as shown in Table 2.3, both video and film shots in hybrids were edited faster than the average in all-film and all-video PFTs.

**Table 2.3. ASLs of film, video and video-led hybrid PFTs**

Aesthetic	Seconds (proportion of sample)	Film shots ASL	Video shots ASL	Total ASL
<b>All-film</b>	102,431 (32.69%)	<b>8.62</b>	<b>N/A.</b>	<b>8.62</b>
<b>Video-led hybrid</b>	133,751 (42.69%)	<b>7.56</b>	<b>9.26</b>	<b>8.85</b>
<b>All-video</b>	77,123 (24.62%)	<b>N/A.</b>	<b>9.92</b>	<b>9.92</b>
<u>OVERALL</u>	<u>313,305</u>	<u>8.37</u>	<u>9.53</u>	<u>9.01</u>

Figure 2.1 shows how PFT and feature-films' mean ASLs fluctuated over time. Analysing all 1,234 feature films from 1970-84 in Barry Salt's dataset shows steady annual ASLs of between 7-8 seconds.<sup>196</sup>

<sup>195</sup> Eyre (2020) op. cit.

<sup>196</sup> Salt (2022) op. cit.

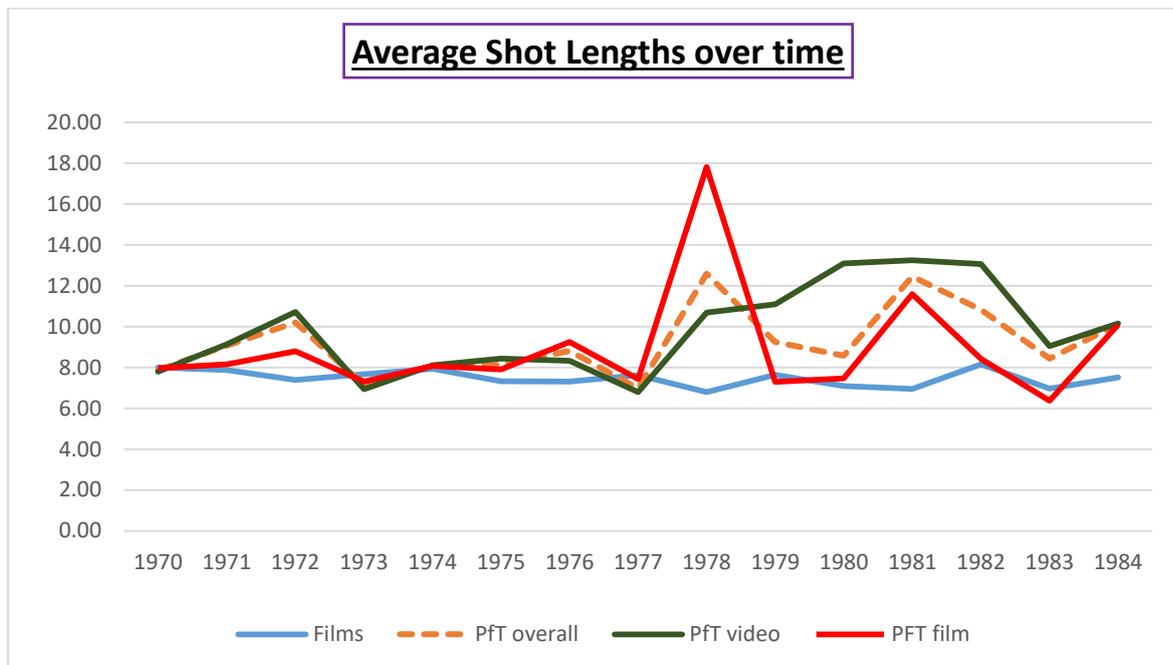


Figure 2.1. ASLs over time for feature-films, PFT overall and its videoed and filmed material.

Notably, during PFT’s less popular phase in 1972, it diverged somewhat from the general feature-film pattern; though, it then converged almost entirely when enjoying its peak popularity in 1973-77 (see Appendices 4 and 5 for evidence of this era’s success). At this time, when there was an increased proportion of all-filmed and video-led hybrids, PFT’s yearly ASLs were 7-8.8 and video and film pacing did not differ markedly.

Barry Salt’s claim that slow ASLs correlate with artistic pretensions has *some* truth; PFT’s pretensions may be seen non-pejoratively as encouraging critical social thinking in viewers.<sup>197</sup> While 1978’s result is influenced by having the slowest cut of all in the sample, *The Spongers*, 1981 is when PFT was at its leisureliest, while also being at its most representationally ground-breaking – for example, *Beyond the Pale*, *The Garland* and *Sorry*. In addition, directors Alan Clarke and Richard Eyre used film (*Beloved Enemy*, *Country*) and video (*Psy-Warriors*) in 1981 for highly meditative and critical purposes.<sup>198</sup> *The Spongers* exemplifies how PFTs with especially challenging and disturbing themes tended to have slower ASLs than the average, whether video or film: other examples include *Baby Love*, *A Story to Frighten the Children*, *Billy* and *Sorry* (1981).

While the fastest *and* slowest PFTs sampled are all-filmed, there is a general trend for video PFTs to be slower, with eight of the top ten slowest being either all-video or video-led

<sup>197</sup> Salt (1983) op. cit. 349.

<sup>198</sup> This parallels Bordwell’s discernment that ‘indie’ directors like Hal Hartley use slower ASLs, and Hollywood resorts to slower cutting when aiming for ‘scenes laden with European gravitas’: Bordwell op. cit. 140.

hybrids – four of which are all-VS. However, seven of the ten fastest are videoed, though only two of these are all-video, alongside five video-led hybrids, broadcast in 1970-75. This reflects the wider finding that PFTs were faster from 1970-77 and slower from 1978-84. As Table 2.4 shows, the latter period saw a notable divergence in PFT’s use of film from the quickening trend in mainstream Hollywood cinema, while its use of video was even more out-of-kilter, reflecting latter-day PFT’s greater kinship with European art cinema.<sup>199</sup>

**Table 2.4. Trends in ASLs, 1970-77 and 1978-84**

<b>Years</b>	<b>ASL (All feature-films; Cinematics)</b>	<b>ASL (All PFTs)</b>	<b>ASL (video in PFTs)</b>	<b>ASL (film in PFTs)</b>
1970-1977	<b>8.31</b>	<b>8.20</b>	<b>8.76</b>	<b>8.08</b>
1978-1984	<b>7.29</b>	<b>10.03</b>	<b>11.39</b>	<b>8.66</b>
<u>1970-1984</u> <u>TOTAL</u>	<u><b>7.84</b></u>	<u><b>9.01</b></u>	<u><b>9.53</b></u>	<u><b>8.37</b></u>

This deceleration was especially marked in videoed PFTs. Earlier pacier video-led hybrids fusing multi-camera studio with filmed inserts, like those directed by Michael Apted, became supplanted, generally, by more sedate all-video or all-film productions. Later hybrids by directors Bill Bain, Paul Seed and Richard Wilson counter this historical trend, as their cutting of video is faster paced than their cutting of film. More characteristic are hybrids directed by Richard Eyre, Jane Howell and Derek Lister, where film editing is brisker, compared to their stately video pacing.

Furthermore, the sample reveals two types of all-filmed PFTs. The first, pacey regional populism, is exemplified by *Gangsters* (1975) and applies often, but not exclusively, to BBC Birmingham productions. These filmed productions build towards the 1980s renaissance in popularity for British films – prompted, especially, by *Chariots of Fire* (1981) and *Film on Four* from 1982. PFT gave figures like the writer Colin Welland and producer David Rose the experience to enable this revival; a point argued more widely by Mike Leigh and David Hare.<sup>200</sup> Instances of such pacey, FL PFTs set in non-metropolitan areas include Leigh’s own *Hard Labour* (1973), alongside *The Lonely Man’s Lover* (1974), *Keep An Eye on Albert* (1975), *Chance of a Lifetime*, *Thicker than Water* (1980) and 3

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<sup>200</sup> Leigh and Hare interviewed in: *Drama out of a Crisis* (2020).

*Minute Heroes*. These all have ASLs at or below 7. The latter Coventry-set Pebble Mill production includes rapidly edited, populist sequences which stylistically echo music videos. In 1975-80, directors Robert Knights, Michael Darlow and John McGrath use 16mm film or filmed photographic stills as a faster, more stimulating contrast to their PFTs' serener VS sections.

The second type of filmed PFT encourages a sedate Brechtian gaze: the directors steer the spectator to critically examine institutional environments which are failing the underdog protagonists. The camera in these PFTs is often still, encouraging spectators to analyse power relations within the frame: like Barry Davis's *Baby Love*, Roland Joffé's *The Spongers*, Charles Stewart's *Billy*, and, in an historical variant, Richard Eyre's *Country*. Performances are de-emphasised compared to stark framings of corridors, hospital wards, court rooms or social security offices. Static positioning and slow cutting emphasise entrapment and the stasis in protagonists' lives. Clinical framings and deliberative pace encourage the audience to observe and understand the events depicted and apply their insights to public life outside the fiction. This style utilises a documentarian verisimilitude in *mise-en-scène* and fly-on-the-wall camera-positioning – significantly, Charles Stewart had worked on *World in Action* in 1971-72 and would later direct, alongside producer Roger Graef, the seminal BBC documentary series *Police* (1982).

As argued, VS productions, especially, got slower from 1978. The studio environment entailed a form of collective studio labour that limited the kind of creative freedom accorded to cinematic 'auteur' directors. For all studio productions, directors wrote and implemented camera scripts that were dictated by the personnel and technical necessities of the multi-camera set-up. Writing the camera script was a process which Paul Seed calls 'like conducting an orchestra'; Derek Lister recalls how the vision mixer would make cuts according to this document which, as Alan Charlesworth notes, was typed up by the 'unsung heroes', the director's assistants.<sup>201</sup> Directors Derek Lister and Jon Amiel saw studio directing as a challenging technical feat, which denied them the same creative latitude that OB or, especially, film gave them and amounted to a restriction.<sup>202</sup> However, other directors who tended to have slower ASLs managed to regularly achieve artful styles within studio spaces: Alan Clarke, Piers Haggard, Jane Howell, Michael Lindsay-Hogg and Philip Saville.

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<sup>201</sup> Seed, P. (2020) Interview with author, 23 Jul; Lister, D. (2021) Interview with author, 7 Jun; Charlesworth, A. (2021) Email to author, 13 Apr.

<sup>202</sup> Amiel, J. (2021) Interview with author, 18 Nov; Lister *ibid*.

There are great benefits to a slow video aesthetic, which grants actors the time and space to build their characters and rapport with others through sustained performances. Richard Eyre claims that some of the best PFTs were ‘essentially talking pieces’, like Trevor Griffiths’s *All Good Men* (1974), which he recalls as ‘full of very long speeches and discussion about ideology’.<sup>203</sup> Film, with its evocation of real locations, can distract from dialogue and complex ideas: thus, Griffiths’s work is perfectly suited to video. Several PFTs contain dramatic monologues, often shot on video, which is perfect for capturing real-time performances: in Carol Bunyan’s *Sorry*, June Brown delivers a monologue in a single shot of 490 seconds. David Edgar credits *Sorry* for how it uses a VS aesthetic to develop its characters and dramatically calibrate their experiences in a way impossible on film.<sup>204</sup> This style is complemented by a strain of faster video-led PFTs, exemplified by director Michael Apter: the video shots in his *KAF* are 3.45 seconds faster than the film shots. While film opens out the drama and imbues it with geographical verisimilitude, he uses the VS aesthetic to capture Welland’s human factor, gaining telling reaction shots from the array of characters in the Yorkshire pub.

Using a representational perspective, it can be perceived that women writers’ PFTs are generally slower. Discursive, gynocentric PFTs like Elaine Feinstein’s *Breath* (1975), Caryl Churchill’s *The After Dinner Joke (Joke)*, Carol Bunyan’s *Sorry* (1981), Paula Milne’s *A Sudden Wrench* (1982), and Marcella Evaristi’s *Eve Set the Balls of Corruption Rolling* (1982) all have slower ASLs, some exceeding 15. While several PFTs by Julia Jones and Alma Cullen are faster, there is a correlation between women writers and slower ASLs, though a larger sample of female-authored plays would be necessary to prove this more fully. The aforementioned women writers’ PFTs have a more ruminative editing pace, which grants time and space to their women protagonists, who you can see occupying the frame in the screenshots in Figures 2.2-2.7, which exemplify how they are often privileged in CU or MCU shots.

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<sup>203</sup> Eyre (2020) op. cit.

<sup>204</sup> Edgar in: BFI (2020) op. cit.



Figures 2.2-2.7. Screen-shots – 2.2: *Breath*, 00:17; 2.3: *Joke*, 03:03, 2.4: *Meg Davies in Sorry*, 13:09 & 2.5: *June Brown in Sorry*, 31:14, 2.6: *A Sudden Wrench*, 26:07 & 2.7: *Eve*, 26:31.

In these five PFTs, conversations and relationships have primacy over contrived action. They centre on women actors, who were all first-billed in the end credits: Angela Pleasence, Paula Wilcox, Meg Davies, Rosemary Martin, and the ensemble of women actors in Evaristi's play. These gynocentric PFTs, whose style is more analogous to 'intimate' theatre than spectacular cinema, included multi-camera VS productions *Joke* and *Sorry*, alongside the all-filmed *Breath*, while *A Sudden Wrench* and *Eve* were shot wholly on video using Outside Broadcast. However, the faster PFTs are not necessarily

androcentric; they contain substantial parts for Lori Wells, Christine Hargreaves, Paula Tilbrook and Alison Steadman.

Having found that videoed PFTs were somewhat slower than filmed PFTs, that both filmed and videoed PFTs decelerated in editing pace from 1978-81, and that there are several distinctive stylistic approaches that use the film and video aesthetics, the following gazetteer will now analyse eight representative PFTs and their uses of visual and auditory style in greater detail.

## **2.8. Gazetteer of aesthetics and style in PFT**

The gazetteer constitute a representative micro-sample of eight PFTs including three all-filmed, two all-videoed – one OB and one studio – and three video-led hybrids. These proportionately match the overall numbers of PFTs made using each aesthetic. The primary focus concerns how PFT's stylistics of *mise-en-scène*, editing pace and sound design create contrasting spaces; supplementary attention is paid to how these PFTs depicted the strand's regular preoccupations of cultural nostalgia and death. This gazetteer examines the accuracy of the dichotomy previously identified in Table 2.1, while considering the comparative influences of film and theatre on PFT. First is an analysis of an all-filmed PFT from Pebble Mill which challenges Hare's idea of film being faster, and assumes the discursive gynocentric stylistics usually enabled by video. It also uses film for more expressionistic effects which evoke those often used in feature films within the melodrama and horror genres.

Elaine Feinstein's *Breath* (23 January 1975) initially centres on urban demolition in Leicester, the work of cynical, grasping property speculator Clint Lewis (David Raynor).<sup>205</sup> Director Matthew Robinson shows old buildings being demolished, viewed from Rodney Hamer's (Gareth Thomas) car as he drives to work in the city. A mobile camera follows shots of modernist urban architecture, interspersed with shots of the fearful expressions of pregnant housewife Nell Hamer (Angela Pleasence) back in her suburban home. This is underscored by the sharp third movement of Dmitri Shostakovich's *Symphony 8*, a 1943 work named the 'Stalingrad Symphony' in the USSR.<sup>206</sup> The newly homogeneous, remade city skyline signifies threatening changes, the city's mirroring those to Nell's body. Throughout a rapid 22-shot montage sequence (see examples in Figures 2.8-2.11), the kinetic camera heightens the demolition's visceral impact, underscored by Shostakovich's

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<sup>205</sup> In its motif of urban redevelopment, it is part of a cycle of PFTs that also includes *The Piano*, *The Operation* and *Sunset Across the Bay* (1975).

<sup>206</sup> The version we hear is probably the London Symphony Orchestra and André Previn's 1973 recording.

darting strings and wind and brass textures, which convey a harried, ominous mood. There is a stinger when the wrecking ball hits the first building, akin to horror film musical conventions (01:44).<sup>207</sup>



Figures 2.8-2.11. Screen-shots – *Breath*, 01:03-02:28.

Like David Pirie's *RDW* (1984), *Breath* has a surface realism conferred by its use of film stock, but tropes are used which anchor its genre as more fantastical and modernist. It resembles the 'woman in peril' narrative that was popular and prevalent in 1970s literature, TV and film.<sup>208</sup> Like John Bowen's *Robin Redbreast*, *Breath* has a greater depth in how its characterisation and storytelling are infused more with myth and contemporaneity than certain of ITV's 'woman in peril' tales. Both Norah Palmer (Anna Cropper) and Nell Hamer are recognisable protagonists, surrounded by an array of threatening men and women.

<sup>207</sup> Horror film composers like Bernard Herrmann have deployed the stinger for a 'primal' effect on the audience. See Donnelly op. cit. 11, 93-95.

<sup>208</sup> See ITV anthology drama strands *Shadows of Fear* (1970-73) and *Thriller* (1973-76) for many suspenseful, well-crafted but representationally blunt narratives. Peter Hutchings discerns that *Thriller* and a cycle of woman-in-peril films unwittingly parallel feminist arguments and a wider social reality in how practically all men in these narratives are suspect(s). Hutchings, P. (2009) 'I'm the Girl He Wants to Kill': The 'Women In Peril' Thriller in 1970s British Film and Television, *Visual Culture in Britain*, (10)1, Mar, 59-61, 65.

Nell is a middle-class housewife, taken for granted by her patronising and arrogant husband Rodney. We see Nell – side-lined within, or excluded from, the frame – cooking for the dinner parties Rodney holds for his friends. They include social butterfly Elvira Lewis (Gwyneth Powell) and her materialist husband Clint, whose forename signifies Americanisation and who David Raynor gives a harshly nasal, high-pitched northern accent. Mirroring the author Feinstein’s experience, Nell is asthmatic and the play centres on her pregnancy, her physical difficulty in breathing and her psychological anxiety. We perceive the sensitive and intuitive Nell’s subjective sense of exclusion from the cosy, smug worlds of those around her, who are oblivious to her needs.

With Clint’s help, Rodney enlists a home-help – ‘more of a char’, Nell claims – Mrs Pritchett (Liz Smith). In Pritchett, literary writer Feinstein creates a vivid grotesque who figures in Nell’s psyche like a melodramatic villain.<sup>209</sup> The casting of Liz Smith would have played upon audience memories of her performance two years earlier as Mrs Thornley in *Hard Labour*, a feminist drama which reveals a home environment as an exploitative capitalist workplace, rather than a place of refuge and relaxation. *Breath* uses recollections of Smith’s moving and acclaimed performance as the subjugated Mrs Thornley to wrong-foot the viewer. While Pritchett is also hard working, she is a troubling figure, quite unlike Mrs Thornley, who had evoked deep audience empathy.

In long takes, Liz Smith dominates the frame, conveying Pritchett’s mediocre indomitability. She is more physically robust than the gaunt Nell, and her suburban Midlands voice blends the ‘classy’ elocutionary affectations of Margaret Thatcher with Mary Whitehouse’s moralism and has an undertow of menace found in other modernist dramas.<sup>210</sup> In a lengthy speech, Pritchett repeatedly talks over Nell, and voices socially conservative and declinist discourses, alongside class resentment:

**Mrs Pritchett:** You are very kind to me, Mrs Heymer, and Mr Heymer too. He works hard, doesn’t he? I can always tell... It breaks your heart, doesn’t it, the way things go nowadays? It’s always the wrong people have the money, isn’t it? They don’t care, do they, what happens to the rest of us! And the WAGES they’re getting!

**Nell:** I’m not sure about that!

**Mrs Pritchett:** Oh yes, I know! It’ll ruin this country! What they take home you’d never believe it... And all these foreigners...

**Nell:** Well, I can’t quite...

**Mrs Pritchett:** I tell you they can afford anything: holidays... cars... And it’s you and I who *pay* for them, Miss Heymer, you and I! Don’t we? [She fixes Nell with a stare]

**Nell:** Well, I...!

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<sup>209</sup> Mrs Pritchett resembles a Dickensian grotesque or an exaggerated creation by the novelist Angus Wilson; her naming echoes the ‘man-of-letters’ V.S. Pritchett.

<sup>210</sup> *Breath* was broadcast just three days after Thatcher had challenged Edward Heath for the leadership of the Conservative Party. Feinstein’s writing here resembles that of her fellow non-naturalistic PFT writer John Bowen or Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter’s use of non sequiturs and pauses in their absurdist dramas.

**Mrs Pritchett:** Of course it is! Did you read in the local paper about that poor woman, coming home, just with her pension, by the council estate?

**Nell:** Ooh, yes, those boys!

**Mrs Pritchett:** My husband DIED for those boys, Mrs Heymer... But they've the feelings they don't want to work. Why should they, when they can live off the rest of us? [Nell coughing] Well, I'll... just be getting on...

**Nell:** Mrs Pritchett...

**Mrs Pritchett:** Well, it breaks your heart, doesn't it? What's to become of this country?<sup>211</sup>

This is directly followed by scenes of Nell driving through Leicester's terraced streets to the forlorn first movement of Shostakovich's Eighth. She passes a school, which subtly signifies that hope lies in the next generation; that the 8<sup>th</sup> Symphony charts the move from disaster to ambiguous triumph suggests this, which prefigures *Breath's* ending. Later, we learn that Mrs Pritchett has lied about her identity: her nostalgic memories of a religious husband who served and died in the Second World War are false, as he did not exist.

*Breath* has an ASL of 17.1 seconds, containing intricate camera movements within its long takes. One slowly cut sequence observes a large suburban dwelling in Leicester's outskirts that was formerly owned by the deceased old lady who Mrs Pritchett worked for as a charlady. It is boarded-up and derelict: signifying a mid-1970s mood among conservatives that country houses and, by extension, national heritage were under direct, current threat.<sup>212</sup>

*Breath* privileges the youthful Nell's values over those of the older generation represented by Pritchett and Nell's myopic, unloving antiquarian father (Donald Bisset).

Nell is scared by Pritchett's gently malevolent tone when she bosses her about and asserts her routines and values. Nell feels that the childless Pritchett is a threat to her and her baby. Robinson uses filmic devices to make viewers empathise with Nell's fears. Sound design illuminates Nell's nightmares; following Mrs Pritchett's first scene in Nell's home, we hear an exaggerated, crashing sound as Pritchett closes the door. This shifts to an exterior shot as the sound merges with that of a wrecking ball, which we see demolishing a building in a flashback to the opening. We hear consecutive sounds of footsteps and childbirth, then 'MOTHER!' and 'Coo-ee!' From behind, we see a woman in a polka dot dress approaching and entering a house. In this sequence of Nell's nightmare, the monochrome picture is inverted like a photographic negative. After despairing

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<sup>211</sup> Here, Pritchett exercises instrumental power, by flouting cooperative turn-taking – theorised by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson in an article published one month before *Breath* was broadcast – which enforces her authority over Nell: Sacks, H., Schlegoff, E.A. & Jefferson, G. (1974) A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-Taking for Conversation, *Language*, (50)4.1, Dec, 696-735.

<sup>212</sup> See Strong, Binney and Harris for varied arguments along these lines and Patrick Wright (1985) for a more critical account of 1970s disputes over property and national heritage: Strong, R., Binney, M. & Harris, J. (1974) *The Destruction of the Country House 1875-1975*. London: Thames & Hudson; Wright, P. (2009) *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

exclamatives – ‘Don't leave me! Mother!’ – the figure turns, now not inverted; it is Mrs Pritchett.

*Breath* offers the particularly gendered perspectives of writer Elaine Feinstein and script editor Tara Prem, while Angela Pleasence's acting evokes Peter Hutchings's account of Lilian Gish in *Broken Blossoms* (1919) in how she is convincingly extreme in performing Nell's abject terror.<sup>213</sup> In a climactic sequence (52:08-53:02), Nell's terrors are conveyed in a style reminiscent of *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), a horror film that also centres on domestic disquiet.<sup>214</sup> Pleasence had recent experience of horror acting in *From Beyond the Grave* (1974) and *Symptoms* (1974); she executes, expertly, Nell's hunched body language and contorted facial expression (see Figure 2.13).<sup>215</sup> Pritchett asserts, ‘I'll just change my darling's little nappy...!’ which Nell answers with a mitigated imperative: ‘Please don't’. Pritchett brandishes a pin, malevolently; she is shot from below, looming over Nell, and asks: ‘You don't think I'd stick a pin in my darlikins?’ At this, Nell collapses; Pritchett walks away, suspiciously. The desperate Nell cries: ‘Get away! Get away! Get away!’ This sequence has an ASL of 5.4: fast editing and close-ups of Pritchett and Nell inject a jeopardy and jolt the viewer, viscerally.

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<sup>213</sup> Hutchings, P. (2004) *The Horror Film*. Harlow: Pearson Longman, 153.

<sup>214</sup> David Pirie's *RDW* has a strikingly similar scene using a mainstream horror film style. See Appendix 7.

<sup>215</sup> While also known for prestigious period drama literary adaptations and TV plays, Angela would later play the highly-billed role of The Stranger in *The Godsend* (1980). Her father Donald Pleasence had a similarly eclectic career, achieving late fame as Dr Samuel Loomis in five *Halloween* films (1978-95).



Figures 2.12-2.15. Screen-shots – *Breath*, 52:27, 52:32, 52:36 & 52:43.

Nell does not need pills or ‘home help’; she needs to assert herself. However, this ending’s liberal feminism is qualified by Nell’s sudden self-assertion being shown to result from her phone call to Rodney, who finally takes her seriously and returns home. The last shot offers an upbeat, future-facing conclusion, showing the Hamers’ new-born baby in close-up, with its cries audible on the soundtrack. While this ending subverts the typical bleak tones of the women-in-peril narratives that Peter Hutchings details, it does conform to Thriller’s ‘boring regularity’ in how it elides Nell’s agency.<sup>216</sup>

In the middle of *Breath*’s modernist melodrama, director Robinson uses a leisurely ASL which enables Pleasence and Smith to build their characters and enact their central conflict. This PFT’s discursive, gynocentric core is supplemented by faster paced sections; at the end, this creates suspense, sensational action and jolts the viewer into an immersive identification with Nell. This empathy is much strengthened by how the mid-section’s measured pacing enables deep characterisation. In its domestic setting, *Breath* echoes the Gothic televisuality that Helen Wheatley discerns, whereby viewers watching at home will feel the ‘medium-specific sensations of terror and uncanniness’.<sup>217</sup> While *Breath* uses

<sup>216</sup> Hutchings (2009) op. cit. 67.

<sup>217</sup> Wheatley, H. (2006) *Gothic Television*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 13.

higher-resolution film rather than the video-tape suited to evoking the quotidian, in its slow editing it aspires, stylistically, to *Robin Redbreast* or *Thriller*'s largely VS aesthetics.

OB video could also be used in a manner which was emotionally affecting and artistic. In Maurice Leitch's *Gates of Gold* (8 March 1983), set in 1959 in County Antrim, Northern Ireland, a High Church Minister (Denys Hawthorne) gives an uninterrupted five-minute sermon to his 'respectable' middle-class parishioners, a scene cut slowly, with an ASL of 10.5. The Minister's polysyllabic delivery in a Church with a traditional exterior (see Figure 2.16), is contrasted with Low Church evangelicals who have set up in a tent in a local field. He speaks derisively of the evangelicals' 'Crusade' via 'disturbing accounts' he has heard. The Minister constructs the evangelical congregation as an animalised out-group, in comparison to his own congregation, decrying nightly 'scenes of emotion' and 'hysteria', which he associates with a sensationalism imported from the United States of America. While the overall ASL is 10.41, Amiel uses faster cutting, extreme close-ups and visceral framings of preaching, fire and torch light in the tent to evoke emotional extremes, as he was also to do later for Dennis Potter's *The Singing Detective*. Amiel marshals this PFT's OB video aesthetic adroitly: all dialogue is audible, and he roots Leitch's developing characters in deeply verisimilar rural spaces.



Figure 2.16. Screen-shot – *Gates of Gold*, 42:06.

The next two PFTs under analysis are both considerably faster paced. Mike Leigh's *Abigail's Party* (1 November 1977) is historically situated at the end of Television Centre's brisk video style, while Willy Russell's *The Death of a Young Young Man* (30 January 1975) (*TDOAYYM*) exemplifies Pebble Mill's pacey regional populism. The latter, through its title and the device of Bo's address to camera, reveals, from the outset, the protagonist Billy's death. This blunt, irreverent arbitrariness contrasts with the final act of *Abigail's Party*'s classic 'tragedy' narrative arc where Laurence Moss's hubris – his overwork and arrogance – leads to his heart attack and death. However, Leigh's actors play

this tragedy as farce: audience sympathies are likelier to be with the absent Abigail – or Susan – than with the Mosses.

While *Abigail's Party* has fast editing, it opens with a long take to facilitate viewers' anthropological gaze into the habitat of Leigh's devised characters. This first shot lasts 97 seconds and establishes Beverly Moss (Alison Steadman) in 13 Richmond Close in the suburbs of North East London, which she and her aspirational husband Laurence (Tim Stern) have renamed Wibley Webb.<sup>218</sup> Steadman, who grew up in a Liverpool suburb, is a major PFT actor, whose skills were honed in the Theatre Workshop-inspired environment of East 15 Acting School; she performed in nine PFTs (1973-81) and immediately takes centre-stage here.<sup>219</sup> A still camera observes her putting on a vinyl record of Donna Summer's hit song 'Love to Love You Baby' (1975); she dances to its disco beat as we hear its orgasmic moans and lights and smokes a cigarette (see Figure 2.17). *TDOAYYM* opens with Bo (Paul Cahill) speaking to camera; he scorns Billy's (Gary Brown) ambition to be a pop star, 'y' know, on the telly 'n' that...' and, after revealing the tragic outcome of Billy's death, he addresses the viewer, self-referentially: 'Ey! Don't switch off will you!? There'll be laffs before we get t' that!' In contrast to the distanced social critique of Leigh's comedy, there is a tough, working-class gallows humour in Cahill's Scouse-accented delivery and candour (see Figure 2.18).



Figures 2.17-2.18. Screen-shots, 2.17 – *Abigail's Party*, 01:34; 2.18 – *TDOAYYM*, 01:39.

While we see Bo within the real Merseyside location of a Kirkby housing estate, among house exteriors, bikes and grass, we see Beverly in a constructed domestic set.<sup>220</sup> The camera tracks Beverly's movement to the drinks cabinet, foregoing any zooms. In pouring

<sup>218</sup> Leigh has referred to its location as 'theoretical Romford': Coveney, M. (1997) *The World According to Mike Leigh*. London: HarperCollins, 117.

<sup>219</sup> East 15, based in Loughton, Essex, was founded by Margaret Bury in 1961; Bury had worked for Theatre Workshop since 1946. Other key East 15 alumni who worked on PFT include Alan Ford, John Lyons, Ann Mitchell, Gwen Taylor, Kate Williams and *Abigail's Party* cast members Janine Duvistki and Tim Stern.

<sup>220</sup> Russell, W. (2020) interview by author, 27 Mar.

herself a drink, she prefigures later repeated actions in the party. The next 15-second medium shot (MS) centres on Steadman's facial expressions, which connote Beverly's simulated confidence and entrapment in her own skin; as does her constrained, longing mouthing of Summer's words. While Leigh's naturalistic opening distantly observes, Bo's frank address to camera has an immersive, vernacular authenticity.

In shot 3, Laurence enters and kisses Beverly on the cheek; while nothing is notably amiss, the kiss is perfunctory and they do not achieve eye contact, suggesting a distance between the passions signified by Summer's song and Beverly's married life. No other shots in *Abigail's Party* are as lengthy, but several highlight features of the décor which show the Moss taste in décor, furnishings, objects and paintings. This verisimilitude in the studio set credibly roots its characters in the contemporary suburban South and underpins this mordant comedy of recognition. As Ruth Adams reveals, Bernard Levin's review of the original Hampstead Theatre production showed Levin's own snobbish aversion to 'Affluent-Yobbonia', and that the spectators included many people who were similar to the Mosses, who laughed at themselves, 'relishing the excruciating self-identification'.<sup>221</sup>

The play's fast VS style unobtrusively uses conventional continuity editing.<sup>222</sup> Echoing Hannah Andrews's analysis of *Nuts in May*, brisk intercutting between the speaker and others' reactions economically conveys social distinctions and interpersonal conflicts.<sup>223</sup> While Leigh has outspokenly criticised the multi-camera VS production mode used in *Abigail's Party*, it is exceptionally good at capturing the minutiae of facial performances. For example, there are 128 shots solely including Tony (John Salthouse) in the frame, virtually all in medium close-up (MCU). Of these, 99 are zero-to-three second shots of this initially taciturn man's reactions. His facial expressions and vocal responses begin dour and monosyllabic, then become increasingly terse. After his wife Angela (Janine Duvitski) says they're always having rows, Tony replies with a world-weary, 'Yeah...' (see Figure 2.19). When Angela asks a tag question about the reggae song playing at Abigail's party next door – 'Nice music, isn't it, Tony?' – he doesn't even answer at all (see Figure 2.20).

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<sup>221</sup> Adams, R. (2022) *Abigail's Party*: 'It's not a question of ignorance, Laurence, it's a question of taste', in: A. Wrigley & J. Wyver (eds.) *Screen Plays: Theatre plays on British television*, op. cit. 215.

<sup>222</sup> See Salt (1983) op. cit. 345.

<sup>223</sup> Andrews (2014) op. cit. 53.



Figure 2.19-2.20. Screen-shots – Abigail’s Party, 33:17-33:23; 38:21-38:24.

Tony displays deep annoyance and boredom when Angela sings a song when telling a story from her childhood (see Figures 2.21-2.24). Salthouse’s expressive facial nuances and tight body language signifies his uncomfortable taciturnity and passive-aggressive nature. This prefigures the moment where he loses control and angrily shouts at his wife, in bald imperatives: ‘Angela! Coat!’ (88:48) and ‘GET UUUPP!’ (89:12). Salthouse speaks the latter extremely loudly, making an aggressive movement and gesture towards Angela.



Figure 2.21-2.24. Screen-shots – Abigail’s Party, 54:17-54:21.

In contrast to Tony’s morose, gnomic lack of verbal input, Beverly’s domination of her territory is emphasised by how she has sole command of the frame in 244 shots.<sup>224</sup> While only 1.6% of Tony’s solo-shots are long takes lasting 10 seconds or over, 11.5% of

<sup>224</sup> Notably, *Abigail’s Party* has more solo-Beverly shots than the 206 shots in *Breath*’s entirety.

Beverly's solo-shots are, foregrounding her talk and stealthy movements.<sup>225</sup> Only 37% of Beverly-shots are very short takes of 0-3 seconds, in contrast to 78% of Tony-shots. Laurence falls short of the 'tragic hero' in how he is the sole character in 127 shots, one fewer than house-guest Tony, emphasising his peripheral, emasculated quality.<sup>226</sup>

The play's theatricality is manifested in the frozen tableau effect of its short last shot, which fades to black (101:00), that follows a MCU shot of Beverly with her back to us, head on the settee, in despair. The final MS contains all of the characters in frame, including Angela unconscious, Tony, head in hands, and an anguished Susan, with the phone receiver to her ear. Beverly's possession, a reproduction of Stephen Pearson's popular kitsch painting 'Wings of Love' (1972) is central in the frame and towers over the dead Laurence, whose body is covered in a white sheet. The *mise-en-scène* and sound design suggests how Leigh's social critique extends beyond Beverly, encompassing all of her house-guests. The moral victory of Susan's daughter, the absent titular character Abigail Lawson, is clear in how a punk music track from Abigail's party next door persists over the fade and the end-credits.<sup>227</sup> Sound designer Derek Miller-Timmins conveys this as diegetic sound, audible to the characters, which goes on after the action is frozen.

These decisions regarding editing and sound design demonstrate PFT using the TV medium to direct viewers to preferred textual interpretations. *Abigail's Party* has an ASL of 5.33, the second fastest PFT sampled after Leigh's later *Who's Who*, while the populist *TDOAYYM*'s ASL of 7.15 is somewhat faster than contemporaneous filmed PFTs and most feature films. Nevertheless, *Abigail's Party* also uses a slower VS style in its opening ten minutes – with an ASL of 9.2 – to situate Beverly as a tragic figure in her home environment. That its final ten minutes, focusing on the aftermath of Laurence's death, have an ASL of 7 accentuates how his death evokes rather more farcical comedy than sadness.

Now, analysis shifts to PFT's statistically foremost aesthetic, the video-led hybrid. Barrie Keeffe's equally spatially-focused *Waterloo Sunset* (23 January 1979) provides a slower contrast to Ritelis's FL and Leigh's VS approaches. *Waterloo Sunset* has an overall ASL of

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<sup>225</sup> Tony is stood up in only 25 of his solo-shots, while he is sedentary in 102. In contrast to his coiled stillness, Beverly is invariably mobile, exuding nervous energy.

<sup>226</sup> Were this Shakespearean tragedy, Laurence would be the title character. Instead, this socially critical farce foregrounds Susan's punk daughter, Abigail.

<sup>227</sup> Writer Marcello Carlin imagines the future lives of Beverly and Abigail within two expansive and moving blog posts: Carlin, M. (2012) VARIOUS ARTISTS: Disco Fever, **Then Play Long**, 9 Sep [online] Available at: <http://nobilliards.blogspot.com/2012/09/194-10-december-1977-6-weeks-track.html>; Carlin, M. (2016) FLEETWOOD MAC: Behind The Mask, **Then Play Long**, 25 May [online] Available at: <http://nobilliards.blogspot.com/2016/05/fleetwood-mac-behind-mask.html> [both accessed: 09/01/2023].

15.3, with its video being slower.<sup>228</sup> Grace Dwyer (Queenie Watts) absconds from her old people's home, to return to Lambeth where her previous abode was demolished in 1967. While 81.5% of *Waterloo Sunset* is VS, a lengthy filmed sequence (21:48-26:17) roots the drama in recognisable London locations: Waterloo railway station, Waterloo Bridge, Battersea Power Station, office and tower blocks, motorway and shopping precinct. This filmed insert's slow pace – an ASL of 19.2 – shows director Richard Eyre foregrounding the locations observationally, rather than stimulating viewers via rapid montage. Grace is shown as small and insignificant amid the precinct, as she begins to locate her previous home.

Grace witnesses a racist attack by a gang of white men who slash young Black man Jeff (Larrington Walker) with a knife; she helps Jeff home to the tower block where he lives. As Grace and Jeff walk off hand in hand down the subway, we hear a church bell tolling, signifying a new hour and a new chapter as she begins to befriend this contemporary Lambeth resident. Grace shares a cannabis joint with Jeff as he tells her about his Rastafarian faith and she recounts her experiences on the Second World War home front. In her open communication, and joking about the BBC with Jeff, Grace rediscovers herself and the spirit of her cosmopolitan urban working-class roots.

Grace subsequently moves in with Jeff's family; she has a Bob Marley poster on the wall of her room, connoting she has updated her cultural tastes following the earlier appearance on the soundtrack of a recording of the 1930s song which launched a dance craze, 'The Lambeth Walk'. In contrast to *TDOAYYM*, *Waterloo Sunset* forsakes a non-diegetic underscore which manipulates the viewer's emotional responses. Instead, characters perform or play diegetic music – the Kinks, reggae – via vinyl records, and the play achieves its moving emotional impact via Watts and Walker's exceptionally humanistic performances. *Waterloo Sunset* exemplifies the VS aesthetic at its theatrical best in how its VS multi-camera sequences give time to two characters' conversations and enable their rapport to develop without the distractions offered by film or OB: spectacle, action sequences or overly verisimilar locations.<sup>229</sup> Albert Hunt felt that both Cedric Messina's VS and Garnett-Trodd's FL aesthetics could 'become just as enclosed in the world of

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<sup>228</sup> This ASL is close to films (1957-98) by European and Hollywood directors Andrzej Wajda, Otto Preminger, Luis Bunuel, Louis Malle, Olivier Assayas, Wayne Wang and Alain Resnais: Salt (2022) op. cit.

<sup>229</sup> Billy Smart details how Gerald Savory's OB video productions could occasionally distract attention from characterisation and narrative by their self-conscious display of their locations' historic heritage: Smart, B. (2022) Cedric Messina: producing theatrical classics with a decorative aesthetic, in: A. Wrigley & J. Wyver (eds.) *Screen Plays: Theatre plays on British television*, op. cit. 188-208.

irrelevant detail and surface feelings'.<sup>230</sup> Press critics could be far more appreciative of VS set designs than, for example, David Hare was, praising Fanny Taylor's 'opulent designs' for *Hell's Angel* and Barrie Dobbins's studio sets for *Rocky Marciano is Dead* for creating a sophisticated contrast between rooms with and without space and light.<sup>231</sup>

*Waterloo Sunset*'s video-led hybrid aesthetic helps to deeply convey characters' inner lives. Grace's internal voice-overs are accompanied by facial CUs and zooms facilitated by the multi-camera set-up. In a theatre production, voice-over monologues would be delivered via artificial-seeming dramatic address from the actor to the audience, but here they are highly televisual in revealing her deepest preoccupations. Sometimes, we hear Grace's words over 1930s newsreel film footage of political marches, which emphasises her Communist late husband Alf's prominence in her conscious memories. The newsreel's documentarian verisimilitude works in a markedly televisual counterpoint to Grace's theatrical subjectivity.

VS and FL aesthetics and styles are used in similar sequences in the mainly videotaped *Destiny* (31 January 1978), adapted by David Edgar from his earlier stage-play, and the 16mm film-shot *Chance of a Lifetime* (3 January 1980) (*COAL*), written for TV by Robert Holman and directed by Giles Foster.<sup>232</sup> These PFTs share a theme of death with *TDOAYYM*, *Abigail's Party* and *Waterloo Sunset* and each have contemporary-set scenes of fathers grieving following the deaths of their young sons who were serving in the British army in Northern Ireland, in the midst of the Troubles. In *Destiny*, Major Rolfe's (Nigel Hawthorne) son Alan was killed by a young lad from the Divis Flats; while in *COAL*, Andrew Saville's (David Daker) son Gordon (Martyn Hesford) was killed in the Ardoyne, the same working-class Catholic area of Belfast.

In *COAL*, Foster's initial visual style of pacey regional populism decelerates to mirror this PFT's mournful narrative turn. Its funeral scene centres on facial expressions and symbols; no words are uttered other than in the frozen register of eulogies. The lines of mourners from the local community may, for different viewers, signify conformism or solidarity, though Holman conveys a close-knit, friendly Teesside environment. Notably, the casket is shown arriving at the airport, indicated by the sign: 'Teesside Airport will welcome you

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<sup>230</sup> Hunt, A. (1975) Television's real life, *New Society*, 30 Jan, 266-267. Hunt is referring here to two PFTs from its fifth series: the video-led hybrid *The After Dinner Game* (1975) and the filmed *Leeds United!*

<sup>231</sup> Black, P. (1971a) How the pay packet explodes the glorified myth, *Daily Mail*, 22 Jan, 3; Durham, T. (1976) Moody jabs play into life, *Television Today*, 7 Oct, 15.

<sup>232</sup> When discussing his two stage-adapted PFTs, Edgar feels that, while the more social *Baby Love* could easily have been directly commissioned for TV, the more directly political *Destiny* could not have been: BFI (2020) op. cit.

again'. This implies a bitter irony, given the circumstances of Gordon's death, but also suggests how Guisborough-born Holman broadly depicts the area as welcoming.

Andrew has received the news of Gordon's death from Major Ian Anderson (David Buck) soberly and stoically. While stunned, Andrew and Jean (Madelaine Newton), his new wife in their reconstituted family, refuse the Major's offer of alcohol. The army official is portrayed with a sense of veracity, in being well-meaning and uncomfortable in discharging his duty. The family are coded as 'respectable' working-class, via Andrew's job at the local ICI chemical plant. Later, Andrew articulates his intent to react in a 'moral' way: his lack of vengeful feelings may link to a residual northern Methodism, though, according to his other son Philip (Richard Tolan), none of them go to church, and both sons are, implicitly, emergent atheists. Anderson tells them that Gordon was on foot patrol and was killed by a sniper with an MKG2 machine gun. Andrew displays a magnanimous, stoical attitude: 'What training did this lad have?' which causes Philip to call his dad 'weak'.

Jean displays great emotional intuition and rationalism in how she convinces Philip to apologise to his father, which he later does. Holman's play captures this family's everyday decency and intelligence. He also injects a political edge by including a later scene in which they receive a letter from the IRA. Jean's response is: 'That's horrible. What's it for? Haven't they done enough...?' The IRA do not claim responsibility, asserting that Gordon's death is the Saville family's fault for sending him into the British armed forces. This chimes with Philip's earlier opposition to Andrew's decision to allow ex-cadet Gordon to enlist. When Andrew goes out to the seaside to contemplate, he encounters a cheerful unnamed Old Lady (Rose Hill), with whom he shares a superficially banal but poignant conversation. Next, we see Andrew at home; he tears up the letter, and tells Philip: 'just how much I love y'...' This is an exceptionally skilful shift from the initial scene, which lent itself to a Methodist reading, to one which starkly reveals the IRA's Manichean world-view and the effect of its violent realpolitik upon people's lives. In combination, these scenes reveal plausible and complex emotional and political truths.<sup>233</sup>

The subsequent funeral scene contains veracious detail – Jean in a headscarf, Andrew and Philip in black suits and ties – and director Foster's style is respectful. Five of the scene's

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<sup>233</sup> For more on *COAL*, see my analysis of its broadcast and contemporary news contexts: May, T. (2020a) Play for Today at 50: Part #1 – 'Chance of a Lifetime' (1980), **Opening Negotiations**, 3 Jan [online] Available at: <https://britishcoldwarculture.wordpress.com/2020/01/03/play-for-today-at-50-part-1-chance-of-a-lifetime-1980/> [accessed: 06/02/2020]. Commenting on this blog post, Billy Smart notes that Manicheanism existed on both sides, quoting producer Richard Eyre on how the British Army was no better in its attitude to Catholics.

shots fade to white (at 66:20, 66:44, 67:37, 68:05 and 69:12), which connotes religious ideas of grace and a sad serenity. There is a deliberately bleached, misty quality to the picture, and much snow on the ground, connoting winter. We hear a cor anglais, a woodwind instrument whose sound instantly signifies quintessential Englishness, given its famous usage by composers Frederick Delius and Ralph Vaughan-Williams, alongside the Austrian Joseph Haydn.

We witness the priest's melancholic Biblical committal reading on mortality – 'Man born of a woman has but a short time to live [...]' – from John 6:37 in the New Testament. Then, we see the union flag-draped coffin; its flag is removed, revealing a gold engraving on the coffin with Gordon's date of death – 22 February 1979 – and age of '19'. The military ceremonial begins with repeated shouted imperatives – 'Load! Fire!' – commanding the gunners to commemorate Gordon's death (see Figures 2.25-2.26). Following a briefer shot of his unease, there is 12-second shot of Andrew foregrounded in CU in front of other mourners. Daker's tellingly unsure and grave expression evokes both grief and disapproval of guns and aggression. As 'The Last Post' intercedes, he emits an inaudible sigh and looks down, his brow deeply furrowed. The camera lingers on his fixed, uncomfortable expression (see Figure 2.27).



Figure 2.25-2.28. Screen-shots; final four shots – COAL, 70:24-70:44.

This PFT may have been even more powerful had Foster closed with this shot, but it returns to an establishing long-shot of a bugle-player and army mourners in the graveyard within the wider landscape (see Figure 2.28), followed, during the end-credits, by a final panoramic shot of streets and houses, which zooms out, ending with the seaside. This generalised rueful evocation of a wistful beauty in the snow-inflected northern landscape – signified by Fenton’s music – subtracts, somewhat, from the human particularity of Andrew’s face. This ending’s focus is on nature and seasonality, connoting resigned stoicism and downplaying Andrew’s pacifistic anger.

COAL’s 289-second funeral scene’s climactic placement emphasises the play’s tragic quality. The scene’s ASL is 10, far more sedate in comparison to the overall ASL of 6.9. We also hear the perennial military music of ‘The Last Post’ playing, which blends into George Fenton’s melancholic main theme, as the credits progress. The ASLs for these PFTs differ, if not significantly, *Destiny*’s ASL is 2.36 seconds longer. However, its funeral scene is more than *five* times slower. This provides a deeply human moment in a play that ambitiously surveys a wide range of groups and individuals. It starts as Rolfe enters a room in Lisburn, Northern Ireland. The opening shots are silent. As in Edgar’s original text, there is a coffin with a Union flag draped over it (see Figure 2.29). A grave Rolfe is shown to the right of his frame. His son’s army hat is on top of the flag.

The scene lasts 314 seconds and consists of just six shots: its ASL of 52.3 seconds is significantly the slowest section of the play. Shots of 189 (76:50-79:59) and 56 seconds (80:08-81:04) capture every nuance of Hawthorne's real-time performance. Complementing the slow ASL, camera movement is slow, though not quite as imperceptible as Bennett's during the final take of 'Bed'. The scene's longest shot begins in CU of a detail of a painting depicting the putting down of the Indian Mutiny (1857-58), which foregrounds British imperialism's past, the painting's second of three appearances in *Destiny* which figure its persistent relevance to the present. As the camera pans right, slowly, across the painting, a church bell tolls; gradually, it reaches Rolfe's face and frames it in profile, as he begins a monologue (see Figure 2.30):

**Rolfe:** There's a moment in one's life more terrible... More traumatic, even than the ending of a first love. Or the consciousness of failed ambition. Or... Or awareness of the fact of growing old. It is the moment when you realise that you have more time... regard... respect... for those who are your enemies than those you view as friends...



Figure 2.29-2.30. Screen-shots – *Destiny*, 76:41, 77:25.

70 seconds into the shot, director Mike Newell zooms out: revealing the full framed painting and, on Rolfe's lap, the union flag previously draped over his son's coffin (see Figure 2.31).



Figure 2.31. Screen-shot – *Destiny*, 78:25.

Rolfe's left hand gently caresses the flag as he speaks; the camera stays respectfully still for 36 seconds, forsaking intensified continuity. There is a gradual zoom back into Rolfe's face as Hawthorne conveys the dark paradox of Edgar's dialogue by expressing more sympathy for the '12-year-old boy' who killed Alan with a 'Russian rifle' than for the British generals and politicians who have sent his son to be killed. After this opening section, which Hawthorne delivers with painful honesty in a tremulous, quivering voice, Rolfe's paranoid ideology emerges:

The generals, ministers, police chiefs, they won't see we are *at war!* In Belfast, Bristol, Bradford, *Birmingham*... The one we lost in Bombay thirty years ago, the one we're going to lose in Britain, *now*... Unless they see in *time!* Not thugs, or lunatics, nor dupes of Moscow, just *ordinary men and women*, sane and normal, *thousands* of them. And there's no time. They're everywhere! *Deep, deep inside the gut!* There's no time. The *sun has set!*

For TV, this scene is more naturalistic than it was on stage, with Rolfe's 'You still won't see? [...] Will you?' losing its direct address; the change to third-person pronouns makes it more detached and private: 'And they still won't see, will they?' Hawthorne portrays a man baring his soul. Instead of playing a ranting Hitlerian rendering an irrational ideology, Hawthorne portrays Rolfe's intelligence and emotions, which disturbingly accompany what Dennis Potter described as his 'malignancy'.<sup>234</sup> An exemplary slow VS style is used to convey individual humanity in a hermetic space, in contrast with *COAL*'s focus on community and solidarity.

In contrast to *COAL*, 'The Last Post' features earlier in *Destiny*, during the scene of Colonel Chandler's funeral, which was contrastingly all-filmed. Unlike Alan, Chandler had died peacefully after a long and distinguished military career and serving as a Conservative MP. However, Rolfe and Kershaw (Peter Jeffrey) opt not to discuss their memories of

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<sup>234</sup> Potter, D. (1978a) A play astonishing in its excellence, *Sunday Times*, 5 Feb, 35; reprinted in: Greaves, I., Rolinson, D. & Williams, J. (eds.) (2015). *The Art of Invective: Selected Non-Fiction, 1953-94*. London: Oberon, 256-257.

Chandler but instead debate what they see as the way forward for the British political Right, with Rolfe outlining an archetypal declinist view of post-WW2 British history.<sup>235</sup> Rolfe's cold, driven anger prefigures and counterpoints his later fathomless grief at his son's death: revealing his alienation from the society around him, which Newell chillingly evokes in framings of him using public transport. Rolfe reacts affronted when a Black man and an Asian man enter his train carriage (see Figures 2.32-2.34).



Figures 2.32-2.34. Screen-shots – *Destiny*, 26:13, 26:15 & 26:17.

The funeral scenes in *Destiny* and *COAL* are vastly moving, in different ways. The former is more intense, depicting Rolfe's reticence giving way; Foster and Holman's drama embodies 'stiff-upper-lip' stoicism, but also critiques it through the CUs of Daker's facial expressions. Both PFTs depict men, of different classes, suffering, and are subtly critical about the various politics practiced by the IRA, the British state and the far-right Nation Forward party. *Destiny* is the more complete exemplar of the sort of word and performance-centred TV drama acclaimed by Taylor, Hunt and Panos. In contrast to his negative appraisals of several PFT dramatists from the younger generation (see Chapters 1 and 3), dramatist-critic Dennis Potter lauded Edgar's *Destiny* as the 'peak' of PFT's current

<sup>235</sup> In this scene, Rolfe refers to shareholders and businesses losing out and property rights being under threat; he sees 1977 Britain as 'a flaccid sponger's state' and having become 'Europe's whipping boy'. See Chapter 1 and Chapter 5 for accounts of British history in 1970-84.

‘exceptionally strong season’.<sup>236</sup> Rolfe’s monologue scene is profoundly slow, and has a theatre-like immediacy; this compelling grieving scene counters Hare’s claim that the VS aesthetic was alien to artistry. Newell’s direction, Malcolm Banthorpe’s sparing video-editing and Hawthorne’s performance enact Edgar’s words, producing astonishing, humane television art. *COAL* straightforwardly uses film to root Holman’s characters in a verisimilar landscape; its prudent ending contains a dual address to both PFT’s more conservative and radical viewers. According to BBC data, it obtained the highest audience of *any* PFT and its high Reaction Index (RI) of 69 demonstrates that viewers admired it more than the average PFT.

In contrast to Eyre’s *Waterloo Sunset*, which represents the languid, slow-cutting video style at its apex, *Destiny*, also a video-led hybrid, but with fewer filmed inserts, has a rather more statistically typical ASL of 9.3. Both these plays grant primacy to speech between characters: Eyre and Newell’s cameras fix on characters while they speak, either individually or in duologue. These hybrid PFTs include film sequences to supplement their critical drama: the discursive writerly vision best rendered via VS is underpinned by verisimilar real-world locations.

Another exemplar of PFT’s statistically dominant aesthetic form, the video-led hybrid aesthetic (see Table 2.2), is *Rocky Marciano is Dead* (1976) (*RMID*), written by Jewish playwright Bernard Kops and directed by Graham Evans. This rich drama concerns a cantankerous, nostalgic old man Harry (Ron Moody), a retired boxer and boxing coach living in multicultural Camden; Harry aims to come out of retirement to guide a young Black boxer Sonny (Jeffery Kissoon) to stardom. *RMID* is actually markedly faster cut than the Sylvester Stallone-starring film *Rocky* (1976): 8.04 ASL to *Rocky*’s 8.41.<sup>237</sup> While only 12.8% of *RMID*’s duration is filmed, those sections enhance and broaden its appeal. *RMID* strongly exemplifies the strengths of PFT’s video aesthetic, where characters and ideas are granted time and space: as when Harry is telling Sonny about the commonalities between Jewish and Black experiences. This scene, where different generations of Londoners from immigrant backgrounds converse, has an ASL of 8.28. This contrasts with the sequence where Harry trains Sonny: director Graham Evans vividly, rapidly intercuts fast video and film shots which capture Sonny’s fast movements.<sup>238</sup> This whole scene has an ASL of 3.21: statistically identical to *Star Wars*’ editing pace.

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<sup>236</sup> Potter (1978) op. cit.

<sup>237</sup> *Rocky*’s US cinema release was in November 1976. According to Bernard Kops, Hollywood director Sam Peckinpah saw *RMID* while visiting the UK and loved it: Farquhar, S. (2021b) Email to author, 10 Mar.

<sup>238</sup> Critic Tom Durham praised the editing of this scene and *RMID*’s hybrid aesthetics: Durham op. cit.

Many viewers then and now would notice the shift between mainly filmed exteriors and videoed interiors in 1970s BBC hybrids.<sup>239</sup> What they see as jarring transitions between video and film actually create a break in the illusion, which encourages viewers to *watch in different ways*: to enjoy both stimulating action scenes and thinking critically about what they are seeing and applying it to their lives and the wider world, rather than being simply immersed. Arriving near PFT's mid-point, *RMID* shows the strand's assured blend of talk and action: socio-political discursiveness and Hollywood sports movie. Even if it foregrounds the male body more than the aforementioned discursive gynocentric plays, *RMID* grants Sonny's girlfriend Sue (Lesley Dunlop) considerable space and time.

The PFTs in this gazetteer well represent the strand's uses of sound. The filmed regional *TDOAYYM* and *COAL* use library music and underscore sparingly compared with many feature films but to notably manipulative effect for PFT. The five primarily video PFTs have no such non-diegetic music, but instead tend to use diegetic music within their narratives, like the reggae music which establishes the verisimilar London setting in *RMID* or that characters dance to in *Waterloo Sunset*. *Destiny* uses The Love Affair's 'Everlasting Love' in the background of a pub scene; at the end, there is non-diegetic use of Henry Purcell's *Music for the Funeral of Queen Mary*. *Breath* is one of many filmed PFTs without any specially-composed underscore, but uses recordings of Shostakovich's Eighth for visceral and melancholic non-diegetic effects. However, most of *Breath* is silent, using edited sound effects of Nell's asthmatic breathing, and, in PFT's best, understated way, allowing viewers to focus entirely on the words and acting.

## **2.9. Reception of gazetteer PFTs**

These eight plays were all broadly seen as realistic or 'true to life', though their perceived truths were sometimes less palatable to certain viewers. *Destiny*, while perceived as 'believable', was seen some by a quarter to a third of its viewers as a bitty 'series of political speeches', which caused some to switch off.<sup>240</sup> While Nigel Hawthorne as Rolfe, and David Daker as Andrew Saville, give exceptional performances of male emotion, the latter appealed more to a wider public: due, probably, to how Daker naturalistically played a taciturn working-class man, immersed in more realistic filmed locations. Realism was not always welcomed. *TDOAYYM*'s swearing and violence 'might have been true to life but

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<sup>239</sup> Sound recordist Richard Manton notes how the resolution of the 16mm filmed inserts for *Elizabeth R* (1971) is poorer, lacking the 'colour intensity' of the VS sequences: Manton, R. (2021) Interview with author, 22 Feb.

<sup>240</sup> BBC ARD (1978). *Audience Research Report – Play for Today: Destiny*, 17 Mar, VR/78/65. N.b. there was no audience research report for *Gates of Gold*.

did not make an edifying spectacle'.<sup>241</sup> However, while *Breath* was 'dreary' or 'weird' to a minority, rather more thought it was 'horrifyingly' credible throughout.<sup>242</sup> While *RMID* received a less polarised reaction and slightly lower RI than *Breath*, many praised its 'compelling mixture of humour and pathos'.<sup>243</sup> *Waterloo Sunset* was best received of all for being entertaining and true.<sup>244</sup>

Without exception, acting and settings were praised, with no aesthetic distinctions drawn between film and video – VS set designs, like the gym in *RMID*, were also seen as 'authentic'.<sup>245</sup> *Abigail's Party's* sets also received high praise, but there was some criticism of the acting as being 'grotesque caricature', but the ensemble, like those playing the trio of youths in *TDOAYM*, was mostly praised, with Alison Steadman 'outstanding'.<sup>246</sup> *COAL* was praised for the 'naturalness' of its acting, especially David Daker's, further enhancing the 'authenticity' created via location shots.<sup>247</sup> Viewers of *Breath* thought Liz Smith 'impressively spooky'; one viewer's crass question about Angela Pleasence – 'why did she have to look such a mess?' – was answered by another who identified strongly with Pleasence: 'so convincing, one suffered with her'.<sup>248</sup> For his performance in *RMID*, viewers gave Ron Moody 'superlatives' and saw Jeffery Kissoon's acting as 'fine' too; spectators admired *Destiny's* larger ensemble, but did not single out actors' performances.<sup>249</sup> Showing Queenie Watts's exceptionality, some viewers became 'almost ecstatic' when asked about her performance in *Waterloo Sunset*, which received its own RI of 91.<sup>250</sup>

## **2.10. Conclusion**

PfT was itself a hybrid TV drama thoroughly embedded in both theatrical and cinematic practices and technologies, using both with a directness to engage audiences far larger than *either* the film or theatre mediums. This chapter's analysis reveals that rigidly opposing PfT's film and video aesthetics is a false dichotomy, though data does *somewhat* support David Hare's claim that film is fast and video is slow. Videotape was the predominant

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<sup>241</sup> BBC ARD (1975) *Audience Research Report – Play for Today: The Death of a Young Young Man*, 21 Feb, VR/75/73.

<sup>242</sup> BBC ARD (1975) *Audience Research Report – Play for Today: Breath*, 13 Feb, VR/75/57.

<sup>243</sup> BBC ARD (1976) *Audience Research Report – Play for Today: Rocky Marciano Is Dead*, 19 Oct, BBC WAC, VR/76/555.

<sup>244</sup> BBC ARD (1979) *Audience Research Report – Play for Today: Waterloo Sunset*, 15 Mar, BBC WAC, VR/79/41.

<sup>245</sup> VR/76/555 op. cit.

<sup>246</sup> BBC ARD (1977) *Audience Research Report – Play for Today: Abigail's Party*, 29 Dec, VR/77/602

<sup>247</sup> BBC ARD (1980) *Audience Research Report – Play for Today: Chance of a Lifetime*, 28 Jan, VR/80/10.

<sup>248</sup> VR/75/57 op. cit.

<sup>249</sup> VR/76/555 op. cit.; VR/78/65 op. cit.

<sup>250</sup> VR/79/41 op. cit.

technological medium for two-thirds of PFT's output, due primarily to economic necessity, as Shaun Sutton detailed. However, over half of these were video-led hybrids, wherein 16mm telecine film shots were spliced into the VS majority. While clearly technologically determined, the hybrid fused the aesthetic and stylistic possibilities of film and video, as *RMID*, *Destiny* and *Waterloo Sunset* richly illustrate. The former illuminates how PFT could transcend Walker and McGillivray's view of it as talky, to fashion a unique form of popular TV drama which incorporated a political duologue alongside vivid action sequences. The hybrid's cutting pace, for both film and video shots, was quicker than that of all-filmed or all-videoed PFTs.

Many of PFT's best directors were equally comfortable working across FL and VS aesthetics: Clarke, Glenister, Haggard, Lindsay-Hogg and Saville all relished realising the studio's popular electronic theatre potential, as discerned by Gilbert, Hunt, Panos, Shaughnessy, Taylor, Matheson and Scott. In 1977-82, producer Margaret Matheson moulded PFT's image as theatrical via its title sequence, while she, alongside Richard Eyre and Kenith Trodd, increased the strand's more politicised output and presided over a rich roster of productions *balanced* between VS and FL, with an increasing number of all-filmed PFTs, especially in 1979-80. However, the deep preference for film shared by influential creatives like Amiel, Eyre, Hare, Lister and Trodd correlated with how the BBC replaced PFT with explicitly cinematic strands like Screen One and Screen Two, after the exodus of writers, producers and directors who followed David Rose to work on Film on Four from 1981-82.<sup>251</sup>

PFT is overwhelmingly human-centric, dramatising the impact of economics and politics on people's individual and associational lives. Fitting this ethos, 71% of PFTs forsook an underscore, often, if not always, influenced by budgetary considerations. PFT's austere lack of underscores also reflected trust in the strand's writing and how actors, within designed VS spaces or on FL, would convey it. Occasionally, PFT would use the in-house BBC Radiophonic Workshop or library music; more regularly, it would feature sparse diegetic sound design and source music in order to create verisimilitude; as John Goldschmidt chose for his first two PFTs. In PFT's mid-point of 1976-77, underscores were especially infrequent, but, by 1984, their number notably increased, to largely indifferent or hostile critical reaction. Series 15's spasmodic convergence with feature-film style implies a loss of confidence compared with 1975-80 where manipulative steering of viewers was not deemed necessary: after all, they had performances of Angela Pleasence, Liz Smith, Ron

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<sup>251</sup> However, Jon Amiel's distinctive, intensive working practices with actors were due to his background in theatre: Amiel (2021) op. cit.

Moody, Jeffery Kissoon, Alison Steadman, Nigel Hawthorne, Queenie Watts and David Daker's calibre.

FL has been associated with documentarian social realism, VS with discursive artistic pluralism. While PfTs occasionally fit this binary, they more often fuse both approaches, or transcend them. Exceptions abound: VS was used for docudramas like *Child of Hope* and *The Union*, film for fantastical or modernist works like *Penda's Fen*, *The Cheviot* and *Breath*. With the *partial* exceptions of *Breath*, *TDOAYYM* and *COAL*, the PfTs analysed in the gazetteer show the strand using the highly televisual mode of 'talking heads' drama; in this, PfT often anticipated what is one of four choices David Bordwell identifies that filmmakers make which result in intensified continuity.<sup>252</sup> Thus, they represent part of a wider historical convergence between feature-films and the powerful relay medium of TV. However, *RMID*, *Abigail's Party* and *Destiny* show the strand's highly televisual use of sound design and sets built in the studio, which, far from conveying 'irrelevant detail' as Hunt claims, illuminate the narrative and help us to analyse events, while subtly enabling identification with or against characters. The video-led hybrids *RMID*, *Destiny* and *Waterloo Sunset* represent PfT's combination of the 'urgent and personal' in their dramatisations of how public and private worlds intertwine.

Instead of providing 'tinsel', PfT generally fulfilled Balcon's dictum: most PfTs were in the social realist mode, if to differing degrees – alongside notable numbers of *mostly* naturalistic history plays and docudramas. However, there was a sizeable group of comedies, and more intermittently, thrillers, fantasies, melodramas and science fiction, which occasionally showed flair in breaking with what Pirie calls British cinema's 'tyranny of realism'. Fantasies and comedies peaked in 1970-71, but declined steeply by 1976-77, wherein PfT played safer, but rose somewhat in 1984, with *Z for Zachariah*, *Desert of Lies* and *RDW* all significantly deviating from season 15's naturalistic mainstay. PfT best fulfilled Mark Fisher's conception of popular modernism in 1974-75 through the distinctive contributions of David Rudkin, Dennis Potter, John McGrath and Philip Martin.<sup>253</sup>

PfT's usual choice of realist modes tended to accompany challenging, tough content. *Breath* reverses this, with its modernist style being countered by a morally traditionalist ending. All aesthetics are used in PfT to direct viewers to preferred interpretations – sharp reaction CUs revealing Tony's passive aggression in *Abigail's Party*, while Mrs Pritchett

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<sup>252</sup> Bordwell op. cit. 109-189.

<sup>253</sup> Few PfTs were as exceptionally modernist as *Penda's Fen*, the second series of *Gangsters*, or Screen One's *Ghostwatch* (1992): which, rarely, for PfT's BBC1 successor, gained in excess of 10 million viewers.

figures as a looming horror film presence in *Breath*. However, the filmed *COAL*, with Foster's universalising direction cutting against the grain of Daker's subtly emotive acting, is an especially open text, enabling viewers to interpret its final scene in different ways.

Both filmed and videoed PFTs adopted a more sedate pacing from 1978-81, which diverges from feature-films of that time. Regardless of the aesthetic, directors like Alan Clarke, Richard Eyre and Jon Amiel tended to cut slower, while Michael Custance, Alan Grint and Mike Leigh used faster editing, building on the earlier fast pace of VS shots during 1972-77. In 1978-79, *The Spongers* and *Billy* marked the height of PFT's sedate Brechtian visual style, which encouraged critical thinking in viewers via detached, documentarian framings. With the exception of Julia Jones's work, there is tentative evidence that female-authored PFTs were cut more slowly and privileged human-centric dialogue over action.

Chapter 3, which follows, will chart critical and audience reception of the strand in detail. Discourse analysis will be applied to both viewers and critics to uncover whether outlooks, were associated with gender, class or geographical location. Chapter 3 will build on Chapter 2's analysis of the varied styles PFT used to address viewers, to identify critics' attitudes to realism and non-naturalism, and to discern the nature of PFT's viewers and whether they watched in order to identify with recognisable protagonists or cast a more detached, analytical eye on unfamiliar worlds.

## Chapter 3

### **‘Rather more than just “this evening’s drama broadcast”’<sup>1</sup> – the Reception of Play for Today by critics and audiences**

It was precisely because there was so much failure, so much good, bad and indifferent drama that the times were ‘golden’. The high peaks needed the mountains of the mediocre to support their pre-eminence (Seán Day-Lewis).<sup>2</sup>

**Arne** (Ian Hogg): I make them tamer now. The public have lost the imaginative strength they had. Their sight, and will, to see what is really going on, have been steadily weakened. (PFT *Penda’s Fen*, 1974).<sup>3</sup>

The ‘telly-glued masses’ do not exist; they are the bad fiction of our second-rate social analysts. What the masses, old and new, might do is anybody’s guess. But the actual men and women, under permanent kinds of difficulty, will observe and learn, and I do not think that in the long run they will be anybody’s windfall (Raymond Williams).<sup>4</sup>

On my way up to London the morning after a Play for Today I’d sit in the train listening to people discussing the previous night’s drama and interrupt them with my own opinions (Hanif Kureishi).<sup>5</sup>

To try to say what Crossroads means to its audience is impossible for there is no single Crossroads, there are as many Crossroads as there are viewers (Dorothy Hobson).<sup>6</sup>

### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter will consider Play for Today’s (PFT) reception by journalistic elites and the viewing public. For the former, a range of periodicals have been consulted; in terms of newspapers, tabloids (*Daily Express*, *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail*) and broadsheets (*Daily Telegraph*, *Financial Times*, *Guardian* and *Times* and Sunday equivalents). In addition, specialist broadcasting and arts publications like *Broadcast* (*Television Mail* until 1973), *Television Today*, *The Listener* and magazines like the *Spectator*, *Times Literary Supplement*, *New Statesman* and *New Society* have been used.<sup>7</sup> New correspondences or interviews with television (TV) critics during PFT’s run will be utilised: Julie Davidson (*Glasgow Herald*), W. Stephen Gilbert (*Observer*, *Broadcast*), Keith Howes (*Gay News*),

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<sup>1</sup> BBC ARD (1975) *An Audience Research Report: ‘Play for Today’*, Sep, 1. VR/75/503.

<sup>2</sup> Day-Lewis, S. (1998) *Talk of Drama: Views of the Television Dramatist Now and then*. Luton: University of Luton Press, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Harle, M. & Machin, J. (eds.) (2019) *Of Mud and Flame: A Penda’s Fen sourcebook*. London: Strange Attractor Press, 324.

<sup>4</sup> Williams, R. (1965) [1961] *The Long Revolution*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 361.

<sup>5</sup> Kureishi, H. (1986) *My Beautiful Laundrette and The Rainbow Sign*. London: Faber and Faber, 40.

<sup>6</sup> Hobson, D. (1982) *Crossroads: The Drama of a Soap Opera*. London: Methuen, 136.

<sup>7</sup> It hasn’t been possible to gather coverage from *The Sun*, the *Morning Star*, *Tribune* or the regional press in any systematic way. This Chapter and Chapter 5 include some analysis of culturally marginal perspectives on PFT in *Gay News*, *Spare Rib* and the *Jewish Chronicle*.

Richard Last (*Daily Telegraph*), Mary Kenny (*Daily Mail*), Adam Mars-Jones (*Sunday Times*) and John Wyver (*Time Out, The Listener*).

To ascertain how the viewing public watched and perceived PFT, I will use quantitative and qualitative archival data from the BBC's Audience Research Reports.<sup>8</sup> This will be accompanied by an investigation into the size and socio-economic composition of PFT's audiences, and how its varied viewers felt about being in 'a direct relationship with particular sets of values and attitudes' dramatised within PFTs.<sup>9</sup> Archival BBC and BARB documents are used as evidence to draw conclusions about the amount of PFT's viewers and their perceptions about it. Conclusions about audience demographics are necessarily tentative, due to the relative patchiness of information concerning class and gender.

Drawing upon this diverse material, this chapter will consider the following research questions:

- 1. To what extent do various critics select PFT to review in their columns?
- 2. Was there consensus or dissent amongst newspaper and magazine TV critics regarding PFT? Are any significant changes over time discernible?
- 3. Is Paul Rixon's historicising of TV critics into groups with differing outlooks accurate?
- 4. What was the size and nature of the typical PFT audience?
- 5. Using a discourse analysis, what are the dominant recurring phrases used in critics' and audience's reception of PFT and what underlying cultural presumptions and assumptions do they reveal?
- 6. As per popular myths, was PFT seen primarily as 'worthy', 'depressing' and synonymous with 'social realism'? How did discourses around certain PFTs exemplify or challenge this perception?

In order to analyse the historical development of PFT's image in its reception in a manageable way, I have selected three moments in the strand's history. These reflect, broadly speaking, its beginning, middle and end: series 1 (1970-71), series 7 (1976-77) and series 15 (1984). I will address the above questions using the range of resources gathered for all PFTs within these three distinct periods, with the aim of drawing historical conclusions about how perceptions of the strand shifted over its 14-year run.

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<sup>8</sup> Any gaps in viewing figures data have been plugged by consulting the BBC's Daily Viewing Barometers (up to summer 1981) and BARB daily viewing summaries (from autumn 1981 onwards).

<sup>9</sup> Newcomb, H. (1974) *TV: The Most Popular Art*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 244.

This chapter contains a bias in focusing on post-broadcast reviews over previews, which has limited the attention given to preview writers; this is for practical reasons and as reviews contain far more value judgements. I will discern and analyse patterns in critics' and viewers' persuasive 'argumentation' concerning what they liked and disliked about PFT.<sup>10</sup> This will utilise David Howarth's idea of discourses being 'systems of difference' in language, socially constructed to provide a 'subject position' which social agents can identify with or reject.<sup>11</sup> There will be analysis of what 'subject position' TV critics encouraged their readers, and potential viewers, to adopt and whether audience responses show commonality in how PFT was received.

### **3.2. Literature review – TV criticism**

In the 1980s, Colin McArthur and John Caughie argued that journalistic and academic TV criticism is insufficiently centred on institutions, audiences and aesthetics, and as too often considering programmes in isolation. For McArthur, neither TV programmes nor TV itself should be analysed discretely, but situated within relevant societal, theatrical or televisual contexts. He claims that critics overuse discourses of realism: even a modernist PFT *Blue Remembered Hills* (1979) was acclaimed as an individual work of 'Art' which captures 'the real'.<sup>12</sup> Instead, McArthur calls for attention to how this 'Art' is achieved via actors' gestures and vocal delivery developed in the theatrical contexts of RADA and the RSC, as well as analysing the institutional 'space' the BBC afforded its producer Kenith Trodd. Caughie desires more fruitful interaction between journalism and *Screen's* 1970s film studies discourses; epitomised for him by *Glasgow Herald* journalist Julie Davidson's representational analysis of TV news events.<sup>13</sup>

W. Stephen Gilbert and Caughie reject the idea that TV is ephemeral compared with film or literature, arguing this is only due to lack of access to the archive and journalist critics' dual lack of seriousness and interest in TV's history.<sup>14</sup> They claim that this limited critics' intertextual frame of reference when discussing TV.

Academics have periodised TV criticism. First, Michael Poole discerns a group of 'techno-social' critics in the 1930s-50s, who saw formative TV as a relay for other mediums in its

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<sup>10</sup> Fairclough, I. & Fairclough, N. (2012) *Political Discourse Analysis: A method for advanced students*. London: Routledge, 18-19.

<sup>11</sup> Howarth, D. (2000) *Discourse*. Buckingham: Open University Press, 10, 101-102.

<sup>12</sup> McArthur, C. (1980) Point of Review: Television Criticism in the Press, *Screen Education*, 35, Summer, 60-61. McArthur names Clive James, Chris Dunkley and Peter Knight as these critical offenders.

<sup>13</sup> Caughie, J. (1984) Television Criticism: a 'Discourse' in search of an Object, *Screen*, (25)4-5, Jul-Oct, 109-120.

<sup>14</sup> Gilbert, W.S. (1982) Reviewing the critics, *Broadcast*, 5 Jul, 13; Caughie, J. (1984) *ibid*.

early years.<sup>15</sup> Paul Rixon identifies a group of literary-theatrical 1950s-60s TV critics like Peter Black, Philip Purser and T.C. Worsley, who wrote about TV as an ‘Art’, in a F.R. Leavis-like style, to justify TV as an object worthy of serious study alongside theatre, film and literature for their ‘middle-brow’ newspaper readers.<sup>16</sup> Rixon, drawing heavily on Poole, identifies the ‘neo-critics’, who humorously and impressionistically view TV subjectively from individualistic perspectives, epitomised by Nancy Banks-Smith, Alan Coren, Clive James and John Naughton.<sup>17</sup>

Gilbert, Poole and McArthur form a more ‘serious’ group, opposing James’s populist style, which they see as self-centred and ignoring TV’s modes, grammar and contextual issues. James’s successor ‘neo-critics’ who shared his literary background included Peter Ackroyd, Martin Amis, Julian Barnes, William Boyd, Anthony Holden, Adam Mars-Jones and Jonathan Raban; plus, occasionally, Jilly Cooper, Hunter Davies and Margaret Forster.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the ultimate and first neo-critic was Richard Ingrams, Tory anarchist co-founder of *Private Eye*, who was the *Spectator*’s fageyish TV critic from 1976-84, whose columns display his hatred for television, due to its populism and contemporaneity. Notably, the *only* time Ingrams mentions PFT in its popular heyday of 1976-77 is to say he did not watch it!<sup>19</sup> In contrast, Adam Mars-Jones notes how Rudkin’s *Penda’s Fen* and Potter’s *Double Dare* (1976) made ‘particularly strong impressions’ on him as a young viewer, venerating their modernist authorship in a manner akin to Caughie and Brandt (see Chapter 1).<sup>20</sup>

Outlying figures include semi-neo-critic Nancy Banks-Smith, whose humorous, literary impressionism is well-regarded, including by Mars-Jones, who notes her idiosyncratic style built rapport with readers like him, though John Wyver finds her ‘belletrist’ writing insufficiently analytical; Wyver and others praise Peter Fiddick for offering more serious, institutionally-rooted analyses of TV.<sup>21</sup> Sometimes Chris Dunkley is bracketed with

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<sup>15</sup> Poole, M. (1984) The Cult of the Generalist: British Television Criticism 1936-1983, *Screen*, (25)3, 43-45.

<sup>16</sup> Rixon, P. (2011) *TV Critics and Popular Culture: A History of British Television Criticism*. London: I.B. Tauris, 46-49, 67-99, 103. Rixon notes how these three literary-theatrical critics had all previously been theatre critics.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 101-130.

<sup>18</sup> I wrote to the first nine of these writers to ask about their experiences as TV critics and views about TV and PFT; only Mars-Jones replied.

<sup>19</sup> Ingrams, R. (1977) Old recipes, *Spectator*, 5 Feb, 29.

<sup>20</sup> Mars-Jones, A. (2021) Email to author, 21 Jun.

<sup>21</sup> Mars-Jones *ibid.*; Wyver, J. (2021) Interview with author, 14 May; McArthur (1980) *op. cit.* 59; Gilbert (1982) *op. cit.* 12; Poole (1984) *op. cit.* 47; Ansorge, P. (1997) *From Liverpool to Los Angeles: On Writing for Theatre, Film and Television*. London: Faber and Faber, 124.

Fiddick, though into the 1980s, he became more conservative.<sup>22</sup> Most literature neglects the female, mostly tabloid critics, who disproportionately wrote previews. While Rixon identifies their work as ‘soft television criticism’, he only briefly analyses one article by Margaret Forwood, entirely eliding previewers Anne Campbell Dixon, Elizabeth Cowley, Helen Dawson, Mary Griffiths, Rosalie Horner, Virginia Ironside, Shelagh Massie, Jenny Rees, Judith Simons, Patricia Smyllie, Sue Summers and Betka Zamoyska and their reviewer counterparts Joan Bakewell, Sylvia Clayton, Mary Kenny, Hilary Kingsley, Lyn Lockwood, Mary Malone, Maureen Paton and Mary Holland.<sup>23</sup>

McArthur, Gilbert and Poole identify the 1970s as a turning point when previews began, firstly with ‘Elkan’s Day’ where the *Sunday Times*’s Elkan Allan gained his own privileged access to a few programmes on a Steenberg, which developed in the later 1970s as the *Observer* and *Time Out* expanded their TV coverage with previews. By the late 1970s, Gilbert claims this had become a whole-day event where critics watched a panoply of varied material which, in Poole’s terms, they were engaged to review as ‘multi-component generalist[s] fazed by nothing.’<sup>24</sup> When reviewing Rixon’s book, McArthur sees Rixon’s historicising as useful, but strongly criticises Rixon’s Fiske-inspired neoliberal analysis of TV viewers’ ‘resistance’ through consumer choices.<sup>25</sup> McArthur criticises Rixon’s populist acceptance of Clive James and his claim that Mark Lawson is a ‘serious’ critic.<sup>26</sup> McArthur, Gilbert, Poole and Caughie advance a paradigm that journalistic TV critics self-present shallowly as connoisseurs of TV, whose discourses value TV dramas as discrete *Art* objects using literary criteria of realism. They see Jamesian neo-critics as generalists proudly ignorant of the medium they are writing about, whose function is to self-promote by entertaining their readers, while never challenging their prejudices.

This chapter seeks to assess the truth of such assertions when measured against qualitative and quantitative historical data concerning PFT’s press coverage across 1970-84. In addition, did audience reception mirror groupthink of the literary-theatrical critics and neo-critics in venerating realistic PFTs as *Art* while deriding modernist, non-naturalistic PFTs?

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<sup>22</sup> Rixon op. cit. 84. Dunkley’s decline is evident in Dorothy Hobson’s account of his mean-spirited and sexist coverage of Channel 4 in 1982: Hobson, D. (2008) *Channel 4: The Early Years and the Jeremy Isaacs Legacy*. London: I.B. Tauris, 37-41.

<sup>23</sup> Rixon (2011) op. cit. 59, 120-121.

<sup>24</sup> Gilbert (1982) op. cit. 12; Poole (1984) op. cit. 52.

<sup>25</sup> McArthur, C. (2012) Book Review: Paul Rixon, *TV Critics and Popular Culture: A History of British Television Criticism*, *Journal of British Cinema and Television* (9)4, 15 Oct, 646.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

### **3.3. Printed press and broadcasting elites and PFT**

In January 1977, nearly half-way through PFT's run, *Daily Telegraph* critic Peter Knight argued it 'remains the only outlet for the single, original, contemporary play' and, while the quality could vary 'alarmingly', a season rarely goes by without 'one or two distinguished productions which stay in the memory'.<sup>27</sup> PFT was a habitual part of the national conversation around TV. However, the *Daily Telegraph's* critic Richard Last found this an obligation: PFT 'was something I had to review every third week'.<sup>28</sup> All 294 PFTs were reviewed or mentioned in at least one newspaper, magazine or trade publication. The 75 episodes shown in 1984 of *Doctor Who* (1963-89), Granada's *Crown Court* (1972-84) and Anglia's anthology *Tales of the Unexpected* (1979-88) went unmentioned by TV critics of the *Guardian*, *Observer*, *Times* and *Sunday Times*, whereas in the same publications the 15 PFTs received 25 reviews.

Retrospectively, critics' views of the strand's nature and quality differ. Last claims to have found PFT a 'struggle [...] Not having entrenched left wing sympathies'.<sup>29</sup> However, the *Daily Mail's* critic Mary Kenny 'thought it was great. Wish it was still there', notably preferring it to *EastEnders*, an instance of BBC populism that she saw as unscrupulously opposed to Public Service Broadcasting values.<sup>30</sup> PFT's pre-eminence in the TV single-play field is shown by how these papers' critics assessed 64.3% of 1970-71 PFTs, to 27.5% of concurrent Armchair Theatre plays; in 1984, 41.7% of PFTs were reviewed, in comparison to a mere 5.6% of contemporaneous one-off plays in *Sharing Time* (1984), 12.5% of *Love and Marriage* (1984-86) and *none* of *Preview* (1980-84).

Some PFT writers saw press criticism as important: Philip Martin treasured Albert Hunt's extensive advocacy for *Gangsters* (1975); Alma Cullen remembered Clive James's acclaim for her play *A Hardy Breed of Girl* for Granada's *Send in the Girls* (1978) anthology and what she saw as his fair, nuanced assessment of her PFT *Degree of Uncertainty* (1979).<sup>31</sup> BBC managers, in their Television Weekly Programme Review meetings, would usually supplement their opinions of the week's PFT with reference to TV critics' reactions. Minutes of TWPR show that, in 1970, Colin McIntyre specifically brought up PFT's press reviews, but they received increasingly less emphasis over time; in 1977, Monica Sims

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<sup>27</sup> Knight, P. (1977a) Tedious tale of a long lost youth, *Daily Telegraph*, 5 Jan, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Last, R. (2020) Letter to author, 25 Oct. Last implies here that his boss Seán Day-Lewis insisted that every PFT must be reviewed.

<sup>29</sup> Last, R. (2020) *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Kenny, M. (2020) Email to author, 11 Sep.; Buckingham, D. (1987) *Public Secrets: EastEnders and Its Audience*. London: BFI Publishing, 135.

<sup>31</sup> Martin, P. (2020) Interview with author, 17 Jun; Cullen, A. (2020b) Interview with author, 24 Apr. See James, C. (1979b) Belfast dreamer, *Observer*, 11 Mar, 20.

criticised writer Charles Wood’s *Do As I Say (DAIS)* for its misogyny while male managers mostly defended it, and in 1984 Roger Laughton gave caveated praise to David Pirie’s *Rainy Day Women (RDW)*: ‘a very good play, if a shade melodramatic’.<sup>32</sup> Producer David Rose noted the BBC’s promotional shortcomings in not using previous positive press notices for *The Saturday Party* (1975) to promote Brian Clark’s sequel *The Country Party* (1977) (*TCP*) in the *Radio Times* – Rose grasped how press acclaim could potentially boost viewing figures.<sup>33</sup>

Quantitatively, PFT generally garnered less attention from TV critics over time: over half of PFTs were reviewed or mentioned in 1970-72, declining to between 34-41% in 1982-84 (see Table 3.1). 1972-1982 shows an inconsistent picture, with notably minimal amount of post-play coverage in 1976-77, when just 31.8% were reviewed, but notable resurgences in 1979-80 and 1981-82 when 43 and 44.4% were assessed.

While it lost *some* of its cultural centrality over time, PFT remained warmly regarded by critics: in analysing the qualitative responses of critics in 365 reviews across series 1 (1970-71), series 7 (1976-77) and series 15 (1984), positive evaluations (4-5 out of 5 on the scale) outnumbered negative (1-2). However, by 1984 the level of critics’ enthusiasm waned to a degree: 33.7% of reviews were negative, compared with 23.9 and 25.3% of those earlier series (see Table 3.1).

**Table 3.1. Critics’ evaluations of PFT, 1970-84**

	% reviews/mentions	Total reviews	5	4.5	4	3.5	3	2.5	2	1.5	1	AVE positivity %
Series 1 (1970-71)	50.93	180	31	15	44	14	22	11	25	3	15	67.8
Series 7 (1976-77)	31.81	99	17	16	15	9	10	7	18	2	5	68.7
Series 15 (1984)	34.82	86	10	5	21	4	11	6	21	1	7	62.6

<sup>32</sup> BBC TWPR (1970a) Meeting Minutes, 21 Oct, 5-6; BBC TWPR (1970b) Meeting Minutes, 23 Dec, 6; BBC TWPR (1977a) Meeting Minutes, 26 Jan, 18-20; BBC TWPR (1977b) Meeting Minutes, 27 Apr, 15; BBC TWPR (1984a) Meeting Minutes, 4 Apr, 18; BBC TWPR (1984b) Meeting Minutes, 11 Apr, 17.

<sup>33</sup> BBC TWPR (1977b) *ibid.*

This data-set uses a Likert scale of my hermeneutic interpretation of critics' assessments of PFTs, decided via close reading of all 365 reviews. The scale spans: 5 = Very Positive to 1 = Very Negative.<sup>34</sup>

### **3.4. Big-hitters, aesthetics and metropolitan bias**

The first three PFTs in a series can be designated the 'big-hitters', chosen as showcases aiming to attain high audiences and acclaim. The selection of opener was seen as even more important, as when BBC1 Controller Paul Fox voiced his opinion that John Osborne's big-hitter *The Right Prospectus* should have went out first rather than *The Long Distance Piano Player (TLDPP)* in series 1.<sup>35</sup> They *did* generally gain more press attention: 44% of the PFT's 45 'big-hitters' from its 15 series were reviewed or mentioned, to PFT's overall figure of 41%. In series 1 and 2, this was especially marked: with reviews from 67.3 and 69.6% of publications respectively, compared with both series' mean average of 51%. These six early 'big-hitters' comprised three films and involved big-name creators Osborne, Ingmar Bergman, Dennis Potter and Jeremy Sandford.

Of the 23 most-reviewed PFTs, 17 were totally shot on film, while six were mostly or all on video. The six most reviewed PFTs were mostly all filmed – *United Kingdom* (1981; 85.7%), *Country* (1981; 84.6%), *Edna, The Inebriate Woman* (1971; 81.3%), *Dreams of Leaving* (1980; 81.3%), *The Right Prospectus* (1970; 76.5%) and *The Imitation Game* (1980; 73.7%), with the exception of Simon Gray's *Plaintiffs and Defendants* (1975; 78.6%). Leigh's and Rosenthal's PFTs that are especially prevalent in popular memory (see Chapter 1 and Appendix 5) like *Nuts in May* (1976), *Abigail's Party* (1977), *Bar Mitzvah Boy* (1976) (*BMB*) and *Spend, Spend, Spend* (1977) (*SSS*) do not figure in the Top 23. The most discussed video productions included topical or 'issue'-driven dramas like *The Falklands Factor* (1983; 75.0), concerning the historical background of the Falklands War, *Traitor* (1971; 73.3), dramatising Kim Philby's betrayal of Britain and *Coming Out* (1979; 71.4), which represented homosexuality. Conversely, seven PFTs have only been reviewed *once* in the publications consulted: *Three for the Fancy* (1974), *Packman's Barn* (1976), *Jumping Bean Bag* (1976), *The Thin End of the Wedge* (1977), *Name for the Day* (1980),

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<sup>34</sup> I judge how positive the critics are about each PFT based on an interpretivist, historically-attuned interpretation of their arguments and language usage, drawing on Michael Crotty's account of hermeneutics: Crotty, M. (1998) *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*. London: SAGE Publications, 87-111. See Appendix 9 for examples of nine reviews of PFTs from the three sampled series, typed up in full; underneath each one is the score showing my perception of their positivity towards each drama via a Likert score (1-5) and a justification for each case.

<sup>35</sup> BBC TWPR (1970a) op. cit.

*The Good Time Girls* (1981) and *The Remainder Man* (1982). 1972 and 1984 were particularly fallow calendar years in terms of the press ‘buzz’ PFT generated, as were 1976 and 1977, paradoxically given high viewing figures.

Filmed PFTs were reviewed 48% of the time, compared with 38% of videoed PFTs. Indeed, Don Shaw’s *The Falklands Factor* is as an outlier: the only 1980s video-shot PFT to have been discussed in two-thirds of publications. Surprisingly, films weren’t much more front-loaded to the start of series – they comprise 35.6% of the big-hitters, slightly higher than PFT’s overall all-filmed third. However, in 1974-75, all three big-hitters were filmed: *Leeds United!*, *Baby Love* and *Back of Beyond* – and were discussed afterwards by 47.8% of critics.<sup>36</sup>

The opening trios in 1975-76 and 1981-82 were especially successful, being reviewed in 59.5 and 64.1% of publications: almost 20% higher than the remainder of their respective series’. Conversely, 1978-79 and 1983’s big-hitters were ignored, both in comparison to PFT’s average coverage and the rest of their respective series, with just 26.7 and 25% being reviewed. These included adventurous scheduling: *Nina* (1978), female playwright Jehane Markham’s first TV work, and *Gates of Gold* (1983), BBC Northern Ireland’s OB video drama.

While 21.4% of PFT was produced in the regions outside London, devolved PFTs were less likely to be discussed after broadcast than those made in the capital. 42.5% of the 231 BBC London-made PFTs were reviewed, whereas 39.4% of BBC Birmingham’s 39 PFTs, 37.7% of BBC Northern Ireland’s eight PFTs and a mere 26.3% of BBC Scotland’s 14 PFTs were assessed.<sup>37</sup> This trend of regional marginalisation is exemplified by how it took until October 1982 for a PFT made outside London to be used as a big-hitter: the Coventry-shot *3 Minute Heroes*. Tantalisingly, in its Indian Summer PFT showcased regional productions more: following *Gates of Gold*, 1984’s big-hitters included BBC Birmingham’s *Young Shoulders* and BBC NI’s *A Coming to Terms for Billy* (ACTTFB).

The data supports Peter Anson’s assertion that TV critics possessed a metropolitan bias: most of London critics failed to attend a press launch in December 1977 in Birmingham which producer David Rose held for BBC English Regions Drama’s upcoming drama season.<sup>38</sup> Anson notes that Gilbert and Wyver were the exceptions. This general London-centricity is reflected in the low number of critical notices in January 1978 for popular

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<sup>36</sup> This was the only time when three filmed PFTs led a series.

<sup>37</sup> However, 42.9% reviewed the anomalous ‘BBC Glasgow’ production, *The Legion Hall Bombing*, whereas 58.8% of critics discussed *Not for the Likes of Us* (1980), PFT’s only official BBC Bristol production.

<sup>38</sup> Anson (1997) op. cit. 62-63.

BBC Birmingham PFTs like *Scully's New Year's Eve* (16%) and, even, comparatively, *Licking Hitler* (45%). Subsequent BBC Birmingham PFTs *Vampires* (1979; 27%), *Keep Smiling* (1980; 25%) and *Thicker than Water* (1980; 33%) were similarly marginalised.

### **3.5. Critical discourses concerning PFT**

The following sub-sections analyse a range of the most prevalent discourses discerned within the 365 sampled reviews.

#### **3.5.1. 'Mr Nichols paraded a number of bright, instantly conveyed sketches'<sup>39</sup>: Art and authorship**

Reviewers of series 1 PFTs often focus, in a literary-auteur fashion, on the calibre of its writers. Many centred on big-hitters written by John Osborne, Ingmar Bergman and Dennis Potter, and how their authorial visions had been realised. Even a mostly poorly received PFT like *A Distant Thunder* (1970) (*ADT*) was reviewed with a respectfully biographical perspective on its writer, Maurice Edelman MP.<sup>40</sup> Critiques of *The Hallelujah Handshake* (1970) (*THH*) emphasised the perceptive individual voice of writer Colin Welland and related it to his earlier writing for *Z Cars* (1962-78) and *Bangelstein's Boys* (1969), alongside *Roll on Four O'Clock*, shown on Granada the same week.<sup>41</sup> A range of reviewers of *Hearts and Flowers* (1970) (*HAF*) highlighted Peter Nichols's skills as a dramatist for theatre and TV: 'a mordant joker with a deadly accurate eye and ear', who 'can always be relied on to provide a gripping play for TV'.<sup>42</sup>

In writing about PFT, the press mention directors more infrequently than writers, demonstrating how the strand's authorship was seen in literary or theatrical terms. In 1970-71's trio of opening big hitters, the PFT writer received 4.5 times as many press mentions compared with the director, this shrank to 3.4 times as many in 1976-77 and 2.1 times in 1984: a convergence influenced by there being more writer-directors like Les Blair and Anthony Garner.<sup>43</sup> Over time, there was also a discernible shift in critical focus about PFT from writers to actors. By 1984, John Wain's TV writing debut – PFT's adaptation of his

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<sup>39</sup> Black, P. (1970c) A slab of Uncle Harry at the crematorium, *Daily Mail*, 4 Dec, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas, J. (1970c) The accusing gatecrasher, *Daily Express*, 27 Nov, 17; Ironside, V. (1970) TV, *Daily Mail*, 27 Nov, 3; Last, R. (1970) Edelman play lacks his novel touch, *Daily Telegraph*, 27 Nov, 14. Last notes he usually enjoys reading Edelman's novels.

<sup>41</sup> Melly, G. (1970) Anatomist of failure, *Observer*, 20 Dec, 20; Wiggin, M. (1970) Faith, hope, charity, *Sunday Times*, 6 Dec, 33; Banks-Smith, N. (1970b) The Hallelujah Handshake, *Guardian*, 18 Dec, 8; Purser, P. (1970c) Inside or Out? *Sunday Telegraph*, 20 Dec, 11.

<sup>42</sup> Wiggin (1970) op. cit.; Thomas, J. (1970d) A study in black that was far from dull... *Daily Express*, 4 Dec, 16.

<sup>43</sup> There were almost as many references to *Young Shoulders* director Silvio Narizzano as writer John Wain and adapter Robert Smith, perhaps due to his Narizzano's status as an industry veteran and feature-film director.

novel *Young Shoulders* – did not generate anything like the buzz Ingmar Bergman’s first work for British TV had back in 1970. Furthermore, TV critics perceived the playwright Howard Brenton negatively, naming him in reviews more in accusation than in acclamation. By 1984, a star actor-centric discourse had emerged: John Naughton begins his review of *RDW* with several paragraphs about Charles Dance and his recent performance in Granada’s *The Jewel in the Crown* (1984) (see Appendix 7). Other reviewers of PFT’s last series devote much space to burnishing the reputations of Dance, Anthony Andrews, Leonard Rossiter and Kenneth Branagh.<sup>44</sup> The maleness of this list is tangible, though Eleanor Bron is specifically praised within the mixed to negative reviews of *Moving on the Edge* (1984).<sup>45</sup>

Proving Rixon’s claims, TV critics assessing PFT often used a voice akin to the connoisseur of economically and culturally valued art works.<sup>46</sup> In his glowing assessment of *ACTTFB* (1984), Herbert Kretzmer claimed that it was like the earlier parts of Reid-Seed’s trilogy in being ‘a rich, credible collage of working class life, a drama of shifting relationships, magically acted’.<sup>47</sup> Many critics use an artisanal discourse about PFT’s creators.<sup>48</sup> Philip Barker called Ingmar Bergman a ‘craftsman’, while T.C. Worsley saw ‘preparation’ as being ‘the dramatist’s primary craft-skill’, against which he castigated Rhys Adrian’s *The Foxtrot* (1971) for its loose, ‘fragmentary’ narrative.<sup>49</sup> Banks-Smith called Stephen Lowe’s *Cries from a Watchtower* (1979) a ‘well-crafted play’; aptly, as Lowe’s drama concerned watch repairman Andy (Paul Copley) being made redundant by technological and economic change.<sup>50</sup>

The Art discourse peaked in winter 1970. Literary-theatrical critic T.C. Worsley admires Alan Bridges’s direction of *The Lie* as having ‘the kind of unity of palette that one finds in an especially tonal painter’ like Walter Sickert.<sup>51</sup> Davies integrated art and realism discourses, praising Nichols’s ear for speech and manner, his characters in *HAF* being a ‘gallery of portraits [...] surely drawn from life itself!’<sup>52</sup> Echoing Davies about *HAF*, Chris

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<sup>44</sup> Ackroyd, P. (1984) Laugh you must, *Times*, 7 Mar, 8; Barnes, J. (1984b) Dynasty and sweet dreams, *Observer*, 11 Mar, 26; Dunkley, C. (1984) Plays without point or purpose, *Financial Times*, 14 Mar, 15.

<sup>45</sup> Ackroyd (1984) op. cit.; Dunkley (1984) op. cit.; Paton, M. (1984b). Crazy waste of a funny lady, *Daily Express*, 7 Mar, 27.

<sup>46</sup> Rixon (2011) op. cit. 68-99.

<sup>47</sup> Kretzmer, H. (1984a) Disease of body... and minds, *Daily Mail*, 22 Feb, 27.

<sup>48</sup> See Le Moignan, M. (1971) Play for Today: O Fat White Woman, *Television Today*, 11 Nov, 13; Last, R. (1984b) What’s up with mum? *Daily Telegraph*, 7 Mar, 15; Kenny, M. (1984) When family blood runs cold, *Daily Mail*, 4 Apr, 27.

<sup>49</sup> Barker, P (1970) Superb acting in funereal play, *Television Today*, 5 Nov, 11; Worsley, T.C. (1971a) Begging to differ..., *Financial Times*, 5 May, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Banks-Smith, N. (1979) Cries from a Watchtower, *Guardian*, 19 Oct, 11.

<sup>51</sup> Worsley, T.C. (1970a) Potter and Bergman, *Listener*, 11 Nov, 3.

<sup>52</sup> Davies, B. (1970b) One man’s television, *Television Mail*, 11 Dec, 22.

Dunkley claimed Goodliffe (Anthony Hopkins) was ‘painted as the committed rationalist’; Sylvia Clayton saw members of the family group as being ‘drawn with exceptional skill’, while Peter Black used a gallery metaphor: ‘Mr Nichols paraded a number of bright, instantly conveyed sketches’.<sup>53</sup> Clayton praised the following week’s *Robin Redbreast*, for the character Norah Palmer being ‘cleverly drawn’ and her gradual horror clearly communicated.<sup>54</sup> However, Clayton inaptly uses a realism discourse to criticise how the villagers had been ‘artificially shaped to fit’ the myths of John Bowen’s narrative.<sup>55</sup>

Some critics attacked several series 1 PFTs for being overly stylised and insufficiently real. Bernard Davies described the characters in series opener *TLDPP* as being ‘Drawn [...] rather than observed’.<sup>56</sup> Davies’s pro-realism discourse sees the writer as, ideally, a court reporter or Mass Observation recorder, *not* a fanciful artist. Philip Purser ends his favourable review of *Circle Line* (1971) by arguing that ‘some’ TV drama must ‘strive’ for realistic insights, if TV ‘is to remain part of life and not be rarefied into art’.<sup>57</sup> Later, of *SSS*, Davies claims: ‘Rosenthal reported, straight.’<sup>58</sup> Contrastingly, Peter Black notes Dennis Potter’s ‘savagely drawn quarrel of bored Cynthia and her dull husband, stimulated by watching a blue film on TV’ in *Angels Are So Few* (1970) (*Angels*).<sup>59</sup> This artificial PFT scene fails Black’s subjective realism test in, allegedly, not being plausibly embedded in character or environment.

Clayton later critiqued *Gangsters* as being a counterfeit of the Hollywood thriller *The French Connection* (1971): ‘as so often in imitations, colours were over-painted’.<sup>60</sup> David Wheeler described the feminist polytechnic lecturer Hilary (Kate Nelligan) in Charles Wood’s controversial satire of reactions to rape *DAIS* (1977) as ‘overdrawn to a degree that made me, for the first and probably last time, want to unfurl a tiny banner, ‘TV Unfair to Sociology!’’<sup>61</sup> However, Peter Fiddick argued that Nelligan is in radiant comic form and

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<sup>53</sup> Dunkley, C. (1970) Hearts and Flowers, *Times*, 5 Dec, 19. Clayton, S. (1970a) Beautifully observed family funeral, *Daily Telegraph*, 4 Dec, 14. Black, P. (1970c) op. cit.

<sup>54</sup> Clayton, S. (1970b) Fertility rite brought up to date, *Daily Telegraph*, 11 Dec, 14.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Davies, B. (1970a) One man’s television, *Television Mail*, 23 Oct, 18.

<sup>57</sup> Purser, P. (1971a) Shadows of Life, *Sunday Telegraph*, 17 Jan, 13.

<sup>58</sup> Davies, B. (1977) One man’s television, *Broadcast*, 28 Mar, 23.

<sup>59</sup> Black, P. (1970b) Diana’s hooligan family fails to bring the laughs, *Daily Mail*, 6 Nov, 3.

<sup>60</sup> Clayton, S. (1975a) Violence scenes too obvious and too long, *Daily Telegraph*, 10 Jan, 13. David Rose would not have seen the comparison as pejorative; indeed, he was inspired to commission a filmic thriller set in Birmingham after watching *The French Connection* in the cinema. Rose in: *Gangsters* commentary, disc 1, 2Entertain DVD, 2006 [CCTV30272].

<sup>61</sup> Wheeler, D. (1977) Pursued by a graphic, *Listener*, 3 Feb, 150.

‘sweeps in with a face ludicrously painted with concern’ to artfully convey her character’s falseness.<sup>62</sup>

As alluded to at Chapter 2’s close, critics could find certain PFTs’ verisimilar observational detail unwelcome. Peter Buckman criticised the Mike Leigh-devised *The Kiss of Death* (1977) (*TKOD*) for how the characters ‘may have been painstakingly drawn from life – but why make them the subject of a TV play if they are the sort of people you would walk away from if you met them, not in disgust or disbelief, but in sheer boredom?’<sup>63</sup>

Heightened realism was often preferred to low-key realism in characterisation. James Thomas perceived that heightened characters in Colin Welland’s *Kisses at Fifty* (1973) ‘may be a little overdrawn but that is a dramatic necessity. On the whole they ring very true’.<sup>64</sup> This echoes Thomas’s earlier praise of Julia Jones’s *The Piano* (1971) for its ‘nicely drawn scenes which made one despair of the routine of family life and its intense but unimportant infighting’.<sup>65</sup> Echoing retired BBC executive Kenneth Adam, who claimed that Jones’s play showed her ‘at her unpretentious best’, Thomas consistently valued what he sees as human-centric, relatable, everyday PFTs above those which were experimental or fragmentary.<sup>66</sup>

### 3.5.2. ‘What the damn thing needed was a good writer’<sup>67</sup>: genre and experimentation

As Chapter 2 discerned, PFT was perceived as synonymous with social realism, not without reason, but, truly, a range of less naturalistic genres were part of its yearly offering. Sometimes, the strand’s slice-of-life narratives were disliked. Anticipating his later comments about *The Rainbirds*, T.C. Worsley expressed his desire for dramas with closure and shape, feeling that *HAF* was overly naturalistic, too much a plain slice of plain life, illustrative rather than illuminative’.<sup>68</sup> ‘Slice-of-life’ was also used pejoratively about *Hell’s Angel* (1971) by ‘David Agnew’ – the writer was actually Hugo Charteris.<sup>69</sup> However, the phrase figured more positively concerning Welland’s *Kisses at Fifty*, Rosenthal’s *BMB* and Peter McDougall’s *The Elephants’ Graveyard* (1976) (*TEG*).<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Fiddick, P. (1977b) Violation traffic, *Guardian*, 22 Jan, 8. Fiddick provides the most eloquent defence of *DAIS*.

<sup>63</sup> Buckman, P. (1977) Historical romps, *Listener*, 20 Jan, 85.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas, J. (1973) Stealing a kiss at 50, *Daily Express*, 23 Jan, 8; Thomas, J. (1971b) Grandpa’s piano defies the planners, *Daily Express*, 29 Jan, 13.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas (1971b) *ibid*.

<sup>66</sup> Adam, K. (1971) Neighbourly drama, *Financial Times*, 3 Feb, 3.

<sup>67</sup> Buckman, P. (1976) A losing bet, *Listener*, 30 Sep, 420.

<sup>68</sup> Worsley, T.C. (1970b) New writers, please, *Financial Times*, 9 Dec, 3.

<sup>69</sup> Farquhar, S. (2021a) *Play for Today: The First Year*. Self-published: Lulu, 114-117.

<sup>70</sup> Phillips, J. (1971) Unnecessary essay in unpleasantness, *Television Today*, 28 Jan, 13. Day-Lewis, S. (1973) Elopement at fifty skilful play theme, *Daily Telegraph*, 23 Jan, 15; Day-Lewis, S. (1976b) Touching

Benny Green perceives that Julia Jones's lyrical, whimsical comedy-drama *Still Waters* (1972) 'must have looked like a mere doodle in script form' but 'worked beautifully, walking a tightrope over the Gulf of Twee with great skill and feeling'.<sup>71</sup>

PfT's 'slice-of-life' style, that Joseph Hone likened to '*Cinéma-vérité* stuff', was also perceived in the actors' improvisation-based dramatic style pioneered by Mike Leigh and Les Blair in 1973, whose first TV works were both commissioned by producer Tony Garnett. By 1976-77, this 'devised' approach was subject to indifference and hostility: Blair's *Bet Your Life* (1976) (*BYL*) was only reviewed in 11% of publications, Leigh's *TKOD* by a sixth. Of five reviews, four are deeply negative and one neutral; Peter Buckman claimed the dialogue in *BYL* was boringly repetitive and 'What the damn thing needed was a good writer'.<sup>72</sup> Banks-Smith loathed *TKOD*, while Peter Knight claimed that the improvisatory exercise 'proved once again that the most accomplished players can be reduced almost to mute dummies without the writers to supply them with the right words'.<sup>73</sup> This shows TV critics' deep commitment to authorship discourses.

PfT's covert seriousness provoked dissensus over Rhys Adrian's *Buffet* (1976), an experimental comedy, which satirised and reinforced attitudes to contemporary inflation. James Thomas found the play's characters 'dreary', perceived a lack of action and saw it as an 'all-time low' in the PfT strand.<sup>74</sup> However, *Panorama* producer David Wheeler saw it as a 'fairly rare event', in being a PfT that was 'genuinely contemporary, [which] had more to say about the problems of the middle classes than any number of magazine items'.<sup>75</sup> Using a writer-as-journalist discourse, Wheeler claims that Adrian must have spent time in railway station buffets to pick up what he sees as 'the self-pitying phrases of commuter bar-talk'.<sup>76</sup>

Generally, critics neglected or denigrated more experimental or fantastical PfTs. While some of these were widely reviewed – e.g. *The Rainbirds* (76%), *Desert of Lies* (1984; 50%) (hereafter *Desert*) and *Billy's Last Stand* (1971; 53%) – only Barry Hines's latter allegory was well-received, with a 76% positivity score to the others' 49% and 40%.

Although Bowen's horror-thriller *Robin Redbreast* was well-received (75%), it was only

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humour of undemanding comedy, *Daily Telegraph*, 15 Sep, 13; Hone, J. (1976) Not so much a play, *Listener*, 21 Oct, 509.

<sup>71</sup> Green, B. (1972) Not in front of the child, *Jewish Chronicle*, 21 Jan, 15.

<sup>72</sup> Buckman (1976) op. cit.

<sup>73</sup> Banks-Smith, N. (1977a) Kiss of Death, *Guardian*, 12 Jan, 8; Knight, P. (1977b) Shaw pictured rather than examined, *Daily Telegraph*, 13 Jan, 13.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas, J. (1976e) Dreamy buffet duffers, *Daily Express*, 3 Nov, 12. For Thomas, *Buffet* was PfT reverting to 'depressing' type, in contrast to *BMB*.

<sup>75</sup> Wheeler, D. (1976) White House fever, *Listener*, 11 Nov, 614.

<sup>76</sup> Wheeler *ibid*.

reviewed by 35%, including its 1971 repeat; Pirie's historical-horror *RDW* was similarly liked but neglected (70 and 37.5%). Potter's modernist fable *Angels*, Bowen's *A Photograph*, a loose sequel to *Robin Redbreast*, and the dystopian *Z for Zachariah* (1984) (*ZFZ*) were all reviewed by 32-41% and garnered low-to-middling critical reactions of 47-57%.

Pebble Mill's Birmingham-shot PFT *Gangsters* attracted critical animosity for its use of Hollywood crime film tropes of sex, violence and action to make its RAID-style narrative about illegal immigration racketeering entertaining to appeal to a large audience. Peter Lennon saw it as 'pathetically imitative of a score of old Hollywood films' and as lacking in 'social concern' and 'articulate human description'; Nancy Banks-Smith saw it as clichéd, famously ending her review: 'Gangsters is a crime.'<sup>77</sup> Martin Jackson perceived it as unfit for the 'precious' PFT slot due to its focus being 'merely audience titillation and vicarious delight'.<sup>78</sup> Jackson, Lennon and Philip Purser all used a discourse of 'brutality' to decry Philip Martin's PFT, though it was eloquently defended by Bernard Davies and Albert Hunt, who were more in tune with the play's large, favourable audience.<sup>79</sup>

Generally, critics received PFT's comedies or social realist comedy-dramas much more positively: of the 14 identified within series' 1, 7 and 15, *nine* obtained critical positivity of 70% or above: *I Can't See My Little Willie* (1970) (*ICSMLW*), *HAF* (1970), *The Piano* (1971), *The Foxtrot* (1971), *BMB* (1976), *Buffet, Our Flesh and Blood* (1977) (*OFAB*), *TCP* and *Under the Hammer* (1984) (*UTH*). These were generally more frequently reviewed than the PFT mean average, barring *Buffet* (33%), Mike Stott's *OFAB* (24%) and Stephen Fagan's *UTH* (31%). Comedies were received more critically due to a perceived staleness of subject-matter – *Alma Mater* (1971) and *Everybody Say Cheese* (1971) – or for a perceived tastelessness in depicting death, rape and euthanasia: *TKOD*, *DAIS* and *Dog Ends* (1984).

Boundaries in PFT between comedy and social contemporaneity were often blurred. PFTs with a heightened realism like *HAF* and *BMB* were perceived as a 'macabre [...] comedy [with] pathos' and 'social comedy', respectively.<sup>80</sup> Critics described *The Foxtrot* as a 'sex-comedy' and a 'tragi-comedy', while *The Piano* was designated a 'Lancashire tragi-

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<sup>77</sup> Lennon, P. (1975a) The end of the road, *Sunday Times*, 12 Jan, 32; Banks-Smith, N. (1975) Gangsters, *Guardian*, 10 Jan, 10.

<sup>78</sup> Jackson, M. (1975a) A rather nasty piece of work..., *Daily Mail*, 10 Jan, 19. Jackson's review is one of a surprisingly low number of moralistic, outraged *Daily Mail* reviews of PFT.

<sup>79</sup> Purser, P. (1975) Fuzzy edges, *Sunday Telegraph*, 12 Jan, 13; Davies, B. (1975) One man's television, *Broadcast*, 20 Jan, 18; Hunt, A. (1975) Television's real life, *New Society*, 30 Jan, 266-267.

<sup>80</sup> Thomas (1970d) op. cit.; Pryce-Jones, D. (1976) Maimed rites, *Listener*, 23 Sep, 374.

comedy' and 'realistic comedy'.<sup>81</sup> Reflecting differences in senses of humour, Ingmar Bergman described *The Lie* as 'a tragic comedy on banality', while Peter Black felt that British married couples would not receive it as such as they would not recognise its bleak conflict in their own lives.<sup>82</sup> Several PFTs were perceived as 'black comedies': *HAF*, plus the rather less acclaimed *DAIS* and *Dog Ends*, positively viewed by 53 and 59% respectively.

Rhys Adrian's and Douglas Livingstone's experimental comedies appealed more to critics than Leigh's and Blair's improvisatory works. Indeed, Frank Morgan praises *Buffet* director Mike Newell's swooping in among a brilliant ensemble cast who rescue 'one hour and twenty minutes of gloom'.<sup>83</sup> Morgan, thanks God and 'the BBC's head of plays' – James Cellan-Jones – 'that we still have television like this. Nobody else has.'<sup>84</sup> Banks-Smith saw *Buffet* as an 'elegant, desperate and hilarious' comedy and Shaun Usher described it as an 'off-white tragi-comedy' with 'gallows humour', Morgan found Adrian's 'strange' play unclassifiable in genre terms.<sup>85</sup>

An assessment of the reception of Dennis Potter's canonical modernist PFT *Blue Remembered Hills* (1979) (*BRH*), where adult actors played children, largely bears out Colin McArthur's claim that reviewers were 'relentless' in assessing 'every play, no matter the stylistic mode' using 'the realist aesthetic'.<sup>86</sup> In addition to McArthur's quotations from Chris Dunkley, Clive James and Peter Knight, several further critics described *BRH* as 'incredibly convincing', 'authentic, and no doubt, disturbing', or commended Potter's 'very true ear', 'phenomenal [...] recall' and 'exact reconstruction' and the cast for 'reproducing the physical gestures of childhood' without 'caricature [...] to maintain a total unselfconscious naturalism'.<sup>87</sup> This phalanx of critics use realism discourses which avoid situating TV within social, historical and televisual contexts. While Purser shows detailed historical knowledge of two antecedents of adults playing children on TV, he identifies Elmer Cossey as the film cameraman, when it was actually Nat Crosby.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Fiddick, P. (1971b) Foxtrot: Play for Today, *Guardian*, 30 Apr, 10; Day-Lewis, S. (1971b) Tragi-comedy of triangle that survived, *Daily Telegraph*, 30 Apr, 14; Banks-Smith, N. (1971a) The Piano on television, *Guardian*, 29 Jan, 8; Reynolds, S. (1971) The Piano, *Times*, 29 Jan, 12.

<sup>82</sup> Black, P. (1970a) It just goes to show... It's not worth telling your husband, *Daily Mail*, 30 Oct, 3.

<sup>83</sup> Morgan, F. (1976) Enterprising but too gloom laden, *Television Today*, 11 Nov, 22.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. Cellan-Jones had replaced Christopher Morahan in April 1976.

<sup>85</sup> Banks-Smith, N. (1976c) Buffet, *Guardian*, 3 Nov, 10; Usher, S. (1976b) The happy warrior looks back in anger, *Daily Mail*, 5 Nov, 23; Morgan *ibid*.

<sup>86</sup> McArthur (1980) *op. cit*.

<sup>87</sup> Murray, J. (1979a) Superb kids, these adults, *Daily Express*, 31 Jan, 23; Davies, B. (1979) One man's television, *Broadcast*, 12 Feb, 8-9; Holt, H. (1979a) A play to remain in the mind, and yet, *Television Today*, 8 Feb, 20; Purser, P. (1979) Larger than life, *Sunday Telegraph*, 4 Feb, 13. The fifth quotation is from Holt.

<sup>88</sup> Purser *ibid*.

Likewise, McArthur astutely identified how *BRH* was received via romantic aesthetic terms as ‘Art’ with Potter’s authorship extolled. For Davies, Potter provides a ‘faithful picture’, for Dunkley a ‘picture of childhood’, while Purser describes him metaphorically as a ‘painter’ who has pared away all affected narrative tricks, though Hazel Holt felt that his concern with ‘innovative, stylistic superstructure’ obscures ‘the real and deep feeling that inspires and informs all his work’.<sup>89</sup> Richard North, alongside Holt, tempered the unanimous praise; while he called *BRH* a ‘masterpiece’, it was one too ‘depressing’ to be ‘credible’; the conservative North felt ‘got at’ by a ‘propaganda exercise’ on Potter’s part – oddly, given the play’s anti-humanist fatalism.<sup>90</sup> A week earlier, North had also dismissed Barrie Keeffe’s *Waterloo Sunset* as one-sided propaganda; on that occasion, Purser had agreed with him (see Appendix 6). All other critics venerated Potter’s unsettling insights, often comparing *BRH* to Golding’s novel *Lord of the Flies* (1954).

However, McArthur’s argument concerning critics’ obsession with realism is *slightly* overstated: Herbert Kretzmer and Holt note how the ‘distancing device’ of adult actors playing children without ‘total identification’ with their parts successfully communicates insights about childhood and its mirroring of the adult world, in a way impossible if surface naturalism had been adopted by casting children.<sup>91</sup> Critics *did* depart from realist particularity, asserting this PFT’s universality: Clive James claimed ‘the dialogue echoed through a forest as big as the world’.<sup>92</sup> Kretzmer acknowledges its non-naturalism, if via waxing lyrically: ‘With no sense of past or future, Potter’s children were giant, motiveless figures lost in a timeless landscape’, adding that a ‘daringly experimental’ play moved towards its climax with the ‘dense, telescoped texture of a dream’.<sup>93</sup>

In comparison to 1970-75, later PFT generally retrenched into its customary social realism, while continuing to employ many writers from literary and, especially, theatrical backgrounds. In 1984, there were proportionately fewer comedies, allegories, fantasies or thrillers in comparison to 1970-71 and 1976-77. Given the prevalence in series 7 of highly popular comedy-dramas, it is surprising that, in series 15, only *UTH* and *Dog Ends* attempted anything vaguely similar. PFT’s uneven but marked shift in 1981-84 towards literary, middle-class-centric dramas by writers like Rose Tremain, David Cregan, Reg Gadney and John Wain and away from ‘social’ plays by working-class writers – Barry

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<sup>89</sup> Davies (1979) op. cit.; Dunkley, C. (1979) A trio to remember, *Financial Times*, 31 Jan, 13; Purser (1979) op. cit.; Holt (1979a) op. cit.

<sup>90</sup> North, R. (1979) A tricky business, *Listener*, 8 Feb, 225.

<sup>91</sup> Holt (1979a) *ibid.*; Kretzmer, H. (1979a) A daring trip to the cruel land of childhood..., *Daily Mail*, 31 Jan, 33.

<sup>92</sup> James, C. (1979a) Crumbling Crowd, *Observer*, 4 Feb, 20.

<sup>93</sup> Kretzmer (1979) op. cit.

Hines, Jim Allen, Brian Glover, Rita May and Peter Terson – constituted a reduction in the strand's scope which somewhat contributed to its declining standing.<sup>94</sup>

### 3.5.3. 'At last, I'm Left laughing'<sup>95</sup>: ideology, tone and place

Critics discussed the craft of PFT's writers and actors more regularly than they did the strand's ideology, using a meritocratic discourse of individual skill and talent. However, engaging with ideology was unavoidable when considering certain overtly politicised PFTs; often, critics' submerged attitudes to class and gender can be discerned. Critics rarely questioned that politics had its place in this contemporary play strand, but they did occasionally rebuke PFTs they felt transgressed their ideas of impartiality and balance. The extent of this journalistic-BBC discourse shouldn't be overstated: even Jim Allen's *The Rank and File* (1971) (*TRAF*) only received four reviews critical of its propagandist partiality, and most of those appreciated its other aspects.<sup>96</sup> A further seven reviewers strongly admired its realism, which, James Thomas noted, producer Graeme McDonald had personally assured him of; Peter Black and Sylvia Clayton saw Allen as giving a rare insight into radical workers' attitudes, offering a refreshing alternative to the official TV news, which usually privileges the 'executives' in industrial disputes.<sup>97</sup>

Sporadically, Banks-Smith, Holt and Mervyn Jones disapproved of what they specifically identified as PFT's didactic tendencies; Banks-Smith decried a moralising voice-over at the end of *Licking Hitler*.<sup>98</sup> Conversely, Martin Jackson, Peter Knight, Shaun Usher and Judith Simons praised plays by the likes of Tony Parker, David Edgar and Stephen Fagan for avoiding preachiness.<sup>99</sup> Holt claimed that *Light* (1979) epitomised how the stand had 'become heavily weighted in the direction of didacticism' and quoted Aristotle in urging PFT writers to delight as well as instruct, bemoaning how writer Tony Perrin did not adopt any clear view-point but instead presents various two-dimensional characters'

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<sup>94</sup> Cregan's *Reluctant Chickens* feels more in tune with its 1983 cultural moment than Terson's *Atlantis*.

<sup>95</sup> Kretzmer, H. (1984c) *At last, I'm Left laughing*, *Daily Mail*, 28 Mar, 27.

<sup>96</sup> Norman, B. (1971) *The Rank and File*, *Times*, 21 May, 11; Worsley, T.C. (1971b) *Factual fiction*, *Financial Times*, 26 May, 3; Purser, P. (1971c) *Hiss the villains*, *Sunday Telegraph*, 23 May, 15; Whitehead, P. (1971) *Happenings*, *Listener*, 27 May, 693. Phillip Whitehead MP is most concerned that Allen is unfair to fellow Labour MP Stan Orme, while Purser was most negative, seeing it pejoratively as a Manichean melodrama.

<sup>97</sup> Thomas, J. (1971e) *Straining at the danger line between fact and fiction*, *Daily Express*, 21 May, 17; Black, P. (1971c) *The real motives behind a strike*, *Daily Mail*, 21 May, 17; Clayton, S. (1971) *Workers most articulate in strike play*, *Daily Telegraph*, 21 May, 12.

<sup>98</sup> Banks-Smith, N. (1978) *Licking Hitler*, *Guardian*, 11 Jan, 8; Holt, H. (1979c) *Characters displaying their beliefs*, *Television Today*, 22 Mar, 20; Jones, M. (1980) *Male chauvinist primer*, *Listener*, 1 May, 586.

<sup>99</sup> Jackson, M. (1971) *How to sell a sad story without tears*, *Daily Mail*, 7 May, 17; Knight, P. (1971b) *Play's children seen as love-hate objects*, *Daily Telegraph*, 7 May, 14; Usher, S. (1974c) *Pity her, this girl whose crime is love*, *Daily Mail*, 8 Nov, 23; Simons, J. (1984b) *The heartless brush off the artless*, *Daily Express*, 28 Mar, 27.

perspectives.<sup>100</sup> However, the *Morning Star*'s Stewart Lane accused Perrin of privileging the moderate Jack over his stereotypical Communist characters; this contrast demonstrates how any PFT's ideology was, and is, relational to each viewer's own political outlook.<sup>101</sup>

Later, Chris Dunkley, Herbert Kretzmer and Peter Kemp criticised Howard Brenton's *Desert* and Doug Lucie's *Hard Feelings*, transmitted in successive weeks, for their dogmatism. Kemp extended his attack on Brenton's 'caricature' to indict an ideological determinism in his anti-colonialist PFT, which he judges via a facile realism discourse: 'Actuality is enslaved to propaganda [...] the play's setting and inhabitants are kept firmly subservient to Brenton's ruling obsessions'.<sup>102</sup> Echoing critical praise for Jack Rosenthal and Brian Clark's mostly non-political series 7 PFTs, Kretzmer expressed a preference for *UTH* over *Desert* and *Hard Feelings*, admiring writer Stephen Fagan's subtlety in interweaving left-wing politics with a human story.<sup>103</sup> Many critics found Graham Reid and Paul Seed's *ACTTFB* refreshing for its precise delineation of politics and family relationships; Patrick Stoddart praised Reid for avoiding overt point-making about the Troubles and the temptation to make its titular character a victim of terrorism.<sup>104</sup>

Often, the contemporary British voices given airtime by PFT challenged critical sensibilities. While Julia Jones and Colin Welland's non-metropolitan-set plays were widely exalted, other accents offended the London-centric critical ear. Nancy Banks-Smith found the accents in the Greenock-set *TEG* 'impenetrable'; Dennis Potter claimed Peter McDougall's dialogue was 'thick with glottal-stop aphorisms which often verged on the incomprehensible', while Thomas found it 'hard work to listen to', condescendingly arguing: 'At times you felt you needed an interpreter for those ripe Scottish accents'.<sup>105</sup> Banks-Smith, Potter and Hone all describe Jody and Bunny as being Glaswegians, despite Glasgow being 25 miles from Greenock; Potter implicitly links the pair's excessively negative view of marriage with Glasgow Rangers football hooligans who he saw earlier being interviewed on TV after the 'mayhem at Villa Park last Saturday'.<sup>106</sup> While Knight and Purser are less judgemental, only Shaun Usher fully counters the patronising tone by

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<sup>100</sup> Holt (1979b) op. cit.

<sup>101</sup> Lane, S. (1979) Televiews, *Morning Star*, 17 Mar, page unidentified.

<sup>102</sup> Kemp, P. (1984) Colonialist caricatures, *Times Literary Supplement*, 30 Mar, 347.

<sup>103</sup> Kretzmer, H. (1984c) op. cit.

<sup>104</sup> Stoddart, P. (1984) Familiar faces in the crowd..., *Broadcast*, 2 Mar, 29.

<sup>105</sup> Banks-Smith, N. (1976b) Play for Today, *Guardian*, 13 Oct, 10; Potter, D. (1976) The night they went bananas, *Sunday Times*, 17 Oct, 35; Thomas, J. (1976c) Marathon bletherers, *Daily Express*, 13 Oct, 12. Hone (1976) op. cit.

<sup>106</sup> Potter *ibid*.

questioning his readers' prejudices about watching 'an uncouth day out' and, approvingly, quotes an example of McDougall's witty 'use of Scottish idiom'.<sup>107</sup>

Potter was more approving of the use of 'brooding' Irish landscapes and language in Colin Welland's *Your Man from Six Counties* (1976) (*Your Man*): 'The dialogue stood up to the challenge, for you could never hear an English typewriter'.<sup>108</sup> Potter approves Welland's more tightly structured writing in comparison with McDougall or Barrie Keeffe – and claims he is judging on literary rather than identitarian grounds. While McDougall is writing about *his own* community and Welland isn't, Welland conducted extensive pre-production research in villages in Irish border Counties Sligo and Leitrim, as producer Kenith Trodd attests.<sup>109</sup> Occasionally, these linguistic slights resurfaced. In 1984, Richard Last claims that 'subtitles would not have been out of place' for the 'ferocious Ulster accents' in the Belfast-shot *ACTTFB*.<sup>110</sup> More sensitively, T.C. Worsley claims that *The Lie* would have been better in Swedish with English subtitles, while Victoria Radin argues that *Beyond the Pale* (1981) could have been all in Yiddish with English subtitles rather than the English-led mixture it is.<sup>111</sup> Certain TV critics welcomed the vivid specificity and filmic aesthetics of both *The Happy Hunting Ground* (1976), with its North East fish quay setting, and *The Garland* (1981), set in Bangladeshi Birmingham.<sup>112</sup> While the former elicited plaudits for being an 'unsentimental', 'beautiful and true [...] amoral yarn', possessing a 'robust vigour', the latter was unfairly criticised as 'a string of case histories from a social worker's diary' and, in prejudiced terms, as being 'a poor relation of standard literature [...] a slack-limbed drooling production', which ill-served its 'vast numbers of coloured [sic] actors'.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Knight, P. (1976) Raw humour highlights personal rifts, *Daily Telegraph*, 13 Oct, 14; Purser, P. (1976) Rat race, *Sunday Telegraph*, 24 Oct, 15; Usher, S. (1976a) Treasures in the Elephants' Graveyard, *Daily Mail*, 13 Oct, 33.

<sup>108</sup> Potter (1976) op. cit.

<sup>109</sup> Trodd, K. (1976) No pigs in the Kitchen, *Listener*, 28 Oct, 530-531; Trodd, K. (2020) Interview with author, 22 Oct.

<sup>110</sup> Last (1984a) op. cit.

<sup>111</sup> Worsley (1970a) op. cit.; Radin, V. (1980) Well beyond the pale, *Jewish Chronicle*, 5 Dec, 12..

<sup>112</sup> Thomas, J. (1976a) Not a load of old cod, *Daily Express*, 11 Feb, 10; Church, M. (1981a) The Garland, *Times*, 11 Mar, 10. While Thomas extolls Hadaway's play's authentic capturing of its 'rough-and-ready scene', and praises its avoidance of bad language, he inaccurately identifies the location as South Shields.

<sup>113</sup> Day-Lewis, S. (1976) Unsensational tang of market's salty life, *Daily Telegraph*, 11 Feb, 11; Banks-Smith, N. (1976a) Decision: Oil, *Guardian*, 11 Feb, 10; Scott, J. (1976) Camera caught the vigour lacking in the script, *Television Today*, 19 Feb, 15; Murray, J. (1981) New Britons, bumping into old clichés, *Daily Express*, 11 Mar, 25; Davies, B. (1981) One man's television, *Broadcast*, 23 Mar, 37.

### 3.5.4. 'SORDID': Plays for Today or 'Yesterday'? Excessive realism and contested history

A discourse in negative reviews describes certain PFTs as stale or dated. This implicitly suggests reviewers do not just favour realism, but originality and contemporaneity. Critics John Phillips and, repeatedly, James Thomas use a 'Play for Yesterday' discourse to attack 1970-71 PFTs *ADT*, *Alma Mater*, *Billy's Last Stand* and *O Fat White Woman*, which Thomas described as 'a Play for Yesterday'.<sup>114</sup> These four plays all deviated from social realism in differing ways. Thomas was far more appreciative of the heightened realism of Welland's *Kisses at Fifty*, which he saw as refreshingly northern-set and contemporary, following an excess of suburban south-set PFTs.<sup>115</sup> Later, Peter Ackroyd found *Moving on the Edge (MOTE)* a type of drama excessively familiar on TV; Julian Barnes bemoaned its contemporaneity:

[*MOTE*] had 'Play for Today' stamped across it a little too firmly: the wife [...] approaching a certain age and full of suburban angst at the pointlessness of things; her unfeeling estate-agent husband bent on a larger house; her shoplifting mother (Harrods, a lobster); and so on.<sup>116</sup>

In 1984, Thomas's earlier binary juxtaposition of Welland's rooted dramas about ordinary people with 'drawing room comedies' resurfaced in censure of excessive 'suburban angst' in Southern settings – terrain which a range of PFTs by Brian Clark, Beryl Bainbridge and Mike Leigh had skilfully navigated in 1975-77 – by critics who saw this as an overused paradigm in contemporary TV drama.<sup>117</sup>

While most critics praised its power and authenticity, Banks-Smith found Jack Rosenthal's Northern drama *SSS* 'extraordinarily remote and inhuman', seeing protagonist Vivian Nicholson as a 'thumped little drudge who sought and loved brutality ever after'.<sup>118</sup> Last opened his review with the word 'SORDID', also foregrounded in his title, displaying his displeasure at viewing the working-class West Yorkshire world depicted in *SSS*: '[It] dealt with almost entirely worthless people'.<sup>119</sup> Bernard Davies, while admiring *SSS*, judged Nicholson in decidedly Leavisite terms, seeing Rosenthal as 'dealing not with the idioms of race or class or type but with the idioms of mental impoverishment – a mind without

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<sup>114</sup> Phillips, J. (1970) Steam radio with pictures, *Television Today*, 3 Dec, 11; Thomas, J. (1971a) Are public schools really this awful? *Daily Express*, 8 Jan, 14; Thomas, J. (1971c) A coal saga – but it just caved in, *Daily Express*, 5 Feb, 13; Thomas, J. (1971f) Please sir! Teach about a boarding school of fun, *Daily Express*, 5 Nov, 17.

<sup>115</sup> Thomas (1973) op. cit.

<sup>116</sup> Ackroyd (1984) op. cit; Barnes (1984b) op. cit.

<sup>117</sup> Barnes ibid; Thomas, J. (1976d) Boy with real troubles, *Daily Express*, 27 Oct, 12.

<sup>118</sup> Banks-Smith, N. (1977b) Television: Spend, *Guardian*, 16 Mar, 8.

<sup>119</sup> Last, R. (1977) Life of pools winner makes sordid play, *Daily Telegraph*, 16 Mar, 14.

discrimination'.<sup>120</sup> While glowing about SSS, Clive James referred to the 'verbal squalor' of Vivian's interior monologue, betraying his linguistic and class partiality.<sup>121</sup> However, Philip Purser and Shaun Usher discerned Rosenthal's wider indictment of 'generalised prejudice' from neighbours, society and even likely viewers of the drama.<sup>122</sup> There was similar distaste for Barrie Keeffe's edgy, tirade-filled drama of teacher-pupil conflict in a comprehensive school, *Gotcha* (1977). Peter Knight found the Kid (Philip Davis) was a too 'obvious lout', while, for Potter, Keeffe 'managed to make every character hateful, every other speech bilious and any possible conclusion even more sickening.'<sup>123</sup> This is ironic given Potter's own mastery of dramatic and journalistic invective, and displays his animosity towards younger playwrights, unlike those closer to his own age like Welland and Malcolm Bradbury.

Richard North was *Gotcha*'s sole defender, admiring its 'torrent of words and tears and the smell of fear'.<sup>124</sup> Notably, Banks-Smith, Usher and Knight all preferred *Campion's Interview* (1977), Brian Clark's calmer, ruminative PFT which followed *Gotcha* in a double-bill, with its cross-class characters representing educational and political worlds and the spectrum of contemporary English opinions.<sup>125</sup> Another socio-historical PFT, Malcolm Bradbury's *Love on a Gunboat* (1977) (*LOAG*) had been universally praised, including by Potter, for its perceived authenticity in dramatising the mood of the Suez Crisis era through a first-generation middle-class male protagonist who has achieved social mobility through education.<sup>126</sup> Martin Jackson calls the nostalgia 'superb' and both Fiddick and Hone approvingly situate it alongside John Osborne's theatre play *Look Back in Anger* (1956). Bradbury's PFT chimed more with Potter's own experience and habitus than the US import *Charlie's Angels* (1976-81), whose 'tacky dialogue' he criticises in the same review.<sup>127</sup>

Philip Purser reserved his harshest criticism for historical PFTs which he saw as representationally misusing the past. Supplementing his misgivings about Jim Allen's

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<sup>120</sup> Davies (1977) op. cit.

<sup>121</sup> James, C. (1977b) Odour situation, *Observer*, 20 Mar, 31.

<sup>122</sup> Purser, P. (1977a) A pool of storms, *Sunday Telegraph*, 20 Mar, 17; Usher, S. (1977) The day the humbug lost its flavour, *Daily Mail*, 16 Mar, 27.

<sup>123</sup> Knight, P. (1977c) Fictional attack on comprehensives, *Daily Telegraph*, 13 Apr, 13; Potter, D. (1977b) Black magic and chalk dust, *Sunday Times*, 17 Apr, 38.

<sup>124</sup> North, R. (1977) Rooting for roots, *Listener*, 21 Apr, 519.

<sup>125</sup> Banks-Smith, N. (1977c) Loneliest Job, *Guardian*, 13 Apr, 10; Usher, S. (1977b) The rapier beats the bludgeon, *Daily Mail*, 13 Apr, 27; Knight (1977c) op. cit.

<sup>126</sup> Potter, D. (1977a) Rueful remembrance of tinned time past, *Sunday Times*, 9 Jan, 39; Jackson, M. (1977) Goodbye innocence, and all that, *Daily Mail*, 5 Jan, 25; Fiddick, P. (1977a) Love on a Gunboat, *Guardian*, 5 Jan, 8; Hone, J. (1977a) Biplanes and bombers, *Listener*, 13 Jan, 55.

<sup>127</sup> Potter (1977a) *ibid.*

*TRAF*, based on real, near-contemporary events, Purser questions the use of ‘Those sickeningly familiar atrocity clips’ from the Vietnam War in Clive Exton’s *The Rainbirds* and perceives Allen’s *A Choice of Evils* (1977) as ‘a good idea strait-jacketed by too conscious a political partiality’, with a Manichean left-wing outlook.<sup>128</sup> Notably, while Purser criticised left-wing dramas with ‘arbitrary divisions of humanity into good and bad’, he had earlier defended left-wing playwrights as having ‘as much right as anyone else to present their view of the world’ and included *TRAF* in his Top 5 series 1 PFTs.<sup>129</sup> See Appendices 6 and 7 for further evidence of Purser’s conservative responses to PFT in 1978-84.

### 3.5.5. ‘One hour and twenty minutes of gloom’<sup>130</sup>: the PFT-as-‘depressing’ discourse

Across the sample, critics use a discourse whereby even critically-appreciated PFTs are not likely to be upbeat or easy viewing; a charge most often advanced by conservative critics like the *Express*’s James Thomas and the *Telegraph*’s Richard Last. In 1976, Thomas referred to the strand’s past ‘ghastly mistakes [...] indeed at one time it became known in the business as Plague for Today’.<sup>131</sup> In contrast, Thomas praised Rosenthal’s *BMB* for its ‘splendid dialogue’ and Jeremy Steyn’s performance as Eliot and asked: ‘Can this erratic series at last be growing up, just like Eliot?’<sup>132</sup> Last, a relative outlier in negatively reviewing *SSS*, alluded to Thomas in calling Rosenthal’s docudrama adaptation of Vivian Nicholson’s memoir ‘the first in a new outbreak’.<sup>133</sup>

In advancing a pejorative image of PFT’s depressing gloominess, Last and Thomas self-present as wittily puncturing this solemnity, appealing to their readers as no-nonsense, fun-loving subjects in a way that anticipates later critics like Victoria Coren Mitchell (see Introduction). This anticipated neo-critic Julian Barnes’s mimicry of Clive James’s ebullient humour when mocking *ZFZ* as ‘Holocaust-chic’ and jesting about Anthony Andrews’s bum.<sup>134</sup> Furthermore, Barnes wryly calls *Desert*’s cast ‘Heroes of the Week [who] had to cope with Howard Brenton’s dialogue while pretending to be lost in the Kalahari Desert’, making a sub-Jamesian pun on Cherie Lunghi’s name – ‘She Lunghied at

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<sup>128</sup> Purser, P. (1971b) In their true colours, *Sunday Telegraph*, 14 Feb, 13; Purser, P. (1977b) The great deal Moore, *Sunday Telegraph*, 24 Apr, 17.

<sup>129</sup> Purser, P. (1992) *Done Viewing*. London: Quartet Books, 173; Purser, P. (1971d) Fiction Gets Moving, *Sunday Telegraph*, 6 Jun, 13.

<sup>130</sup> Morgan op. cit.

<sup>131</sup> Thomas, J. (1976b) Jeremy’s a star already, *Daily Express*, 15 Sep, 12.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Last (1977) op. cit.

<sup>134</sup> Barnes (1984a) op. cit.

him'.<sup>135</sup> Barnes's discourse was echoed by tabloid critic Hilary Kingsley, who described series 15's opener *Young Shoulders* as a 'heavy load for viewers to bear last night [...] Like most BBC-1 Plays for Today this story by John Wain was no bundle of laughs'.<sup>136</sup> However, Kingsley extended her work metaphor to argue the 'strain' was worth bearing and applauded this Wain adaptation in literary terms as 'a poem about pain and growing-up'.<sup>137</sup>

Clive James's reviews of PFT actually inhabited the literary-theatrical mode more than is assumed: he admires the authorship of writers like Arthur Hopcraft, Colin Welland, Malcolm Bradbury, Christopher Bigsby, Simon Gray and Brian Clark, while, in discussing *Home Sweet Home* (1982), he extolled Leigh as an auteur, comparing him to Jacques Tati, Bill Forsyth and Mozart.<sup>138</sup> James expressed concise approval of PFTs by more overtly left-wing writers Trevor Griffiths, Jim Allen, David Edgar and G.F. Newman, valued such cosmopolitan outliers as *Breath* (1975), *Nina* and *The Executioner* (1980) and offered serious critiques of occasional androcentric missteps (see Chapter 5).<sup>139</sup> Ultimately, critics – including James – found PFT's bleakness palatable, if they saw it as dealing with *accessible* subject-matter, *artistically*. For instance, Hugh Hebert finds *Dog Ends* an aptly 'bleak' satire, performed exceptionally well by Leonard Rossiter and Charles Lamb.<sup>140</sup> All five reviewers saw *UTH* as a refreshing, witty and mordant satire dissecting upper-class and working-class worlds. There is consensus that *some* gloom suits *ACTTFB*, given its Troubles-afflicted backdrop, but several also praise its humour.

Certain critics can be grouped differently from Rixon's taxonomy of literary-theatrical and neo-critics. Peter Fiddick, James Thomas and Herbert Kretzmer were, in their differing ways, constructively committed to PFT as an ongoing concern, often making intertextual references across the series, with the latter pair consistently championing their preferred well-made comedy-drama type of PFTs, epitomised by Rosenthal's *BMB* and Fagan's

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<sup>135</sup> Barnes (1984c) op. cit.

<sup>136</sup> Kingsley, H. (1984a) Pleasure in pain, *Daily Mirror*, 15 Feb, 17.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> James, C. (1972) Bananas with the Duchess, *Observer*, 15 Oct, 37; James, C. (1975c) Playing up the plump side, *Observer*, 11 May, 29; James, C. (1973a) When life begins at fifty, *Observer*, 28 Jan, 32; James, C. (1975a) Taking the week's pulse, *Observer*, 19 Jan, 29; James, C. (1975d) Deep in a married mass, *Observer*, 19 Oct, 25; James, C. (1977c) Princely postures, *Observer*, 1 May, 27; James, C. (1982) Brilliant banality, *Observer*, 21 Mar, 40. However, James had earlier interpreted Leigh's *Hard Labour* as a snobbish middle-class incursion, missing its socialist feminism: James, C. (1973c) Pins and needles, *Observer*, 18 Mar, 35.

<sup>139</sup> James, C. (1974) It really is fantastic! *Observer*, 3 Feb, 28; James, C. (1978a) Stand by for gunge, *Observer*, 29 Jan, 29; James, C. (1978b) Top of the pops, *Observer*, 5 Feb, 27; James, C. (1979c) Beauty and the Beeb, *Observer*, 18 Nov, 20; James, C. (1975b) A lesson in great acting, *Observer*, 26 Jan, 29; James, C. (1978c) Achtung! OTRAG! *Observer*, 22 Oct, 31; James, C. (1980) So long, Jeanne-Paul, *Observer*, 20 Apr, 20.

<sup>140</sup> Hebert, H. (1984) Culling with kindness, *Guardian*, 18 Jul, 11.

*UTH*. While they often opposed dogmatic drama, they admired the heightened realism of *Kisses at Fifty* and the bleak left-wing idealism of *Waterloo Sunset*. Contrasting with Philip Purser or Richard Last's measured conservatism, Shaun Usher and Seán Day-Lewis consistently advanced liberal, humanist critiques of PFT that valued the strand's diversity, its regional scope and experimentalism. Writing for larger readerships than the left-wing critics Williams, Hunt, Gilbert, McArthur, Wyver, Howes and Baehr, these liberal, literary-theatrical critics articulated what PFT *meant* in the public sphere in a language recognisable to PFT creators and viewers.

### **3.6. Audiences – viewing figures and composition**

The following section will assess evidence regarding the size and demographic composition of PFT's audience; first, this requires situating the practice of measuring audiences in its historical context.

Until the formation in 1980 of the standardising Broadcasters' Audience Research Board (BARB), the BBC Audience Research Department (ARD) vied with ITV's TAM and JICTAR systems in measuring audience size. ARD founder Robert Silvey regarded the BBC's as a truer, more conservative estimate of viewers, which factored in attentiveness: the ARD only counted TV viewers who had watched more than half of the programme.<sup>141</sup> In contrast, TAM's figures, while supplemented by viewer diaries called TAMlogs, were primarily based on the TAMmeter, attached to TV-sets, which would simply record sets being on and which channels they were tuned into.<sup>142</sup> This gave the TAM figures the appearance of being more scientifically 'objective' and less reliant on viewer memory.

Weekly TAM Top 20s were widely disseminated in the press, as part of 'ratings war' discourses, with ITV invariably dominating these charts, which were useful for advertisers in maximising their returns in dealing with ITV. Stefan Schwarzkopf notes that BARB's founding in 1980 in response to the 1977 Annan Committee's recommendations defused the argument over whether broadcasting should be a public service for engaged citizens or an advertising-funded business model targeting consumers.<sup>143</sup> BARB followed Annan's recommendation of a unified system by fusing ITV's Setmeters and diaries with the BBC ARD's more qualitative questionnaires and interviews.

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<sup>141</sup> Schwarzkopf, S. (2014) *The Politics of Enjoyment: Competing Audience Measurement Systems in Britain, 1950-1980*, in: J. Bourdon & C. Méadel (eds.) *Television Audiences Across the World: Deconstructing the Ratings Machine*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 33-52.

<sup>142</sup> TAMmeters originated in Chicago businessman Arthur C. Nielsen. They were replaced by AGB's Setmeters from 1968. Schwarzkopf *ibid.* 45.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.* 48.

In 1966, Silvey robustly defended the ARD methodology, claiming TAM's figures were inflated: counting all those who were potentially in earshot of a given programme, not whether they concentrated or watched it all.<sup>144</sup> Silvey admitted that ARD figures may have sometimes under-sampled those in the National Readership Survey (NRS)'s occupation-based DE social grade, but TAM also over-sampled ITV-loyal families. Silvey notes how, in the early years of ITV, there was a stark social class divide in how ITV appealed to large numbers of working-class viewers via showing Westerns and Variety; circa 1958, the BBC was strongly correlated with broadsheet readership and ITV with tabloids.<sup>145</sup> However, under Hugh Greene's liberalising, populist leadership, BBC TV increased its audience share considerably by appealing to working-class viewers: a process Silvey sees as further abetted by the Pilkington Report in 1962, though he accepts the channels still maintained the vestiges of their earlier images and links with newspaper readership.<sup>146</sup>

### **3.7. PFT audience size, demographics and perceptions of the strand**

There is detailed evidence of the nature of PFT's audience at one snapshot in time and how viewers perceived the strand. In spring 1975, the BBC commissioned the marketing research agency RSGB to conduct a survey of public perceptions of PFT, 'the main outlet' on BBC TV 'for new plays of longer duration', via interviews.<sup>147</sup>

PFT's predecessor TWP had played a major role, along with comedies *TW3* (1962-63), *Till Death Us Do Part* (1965-75) and *Steptoe and Son* (1962-74) in the Greene era BBC's broadening of its appeal via more irreverence and earthiness. The 169 WPs averaged audiences of 7.18 million, with 8.9% of WPs being watched by a fifth or higher of the UK population aged 5 and over. The 294 PFTs gained a mean average audience of 5.63 million, a 34.1% viewing share, as against ITV programmes' 45% in the same slot – see Table 3.2.<sup>148</sup> As Johnny Walker explains, TV audience measurement initially neglected the new viewing practice of time-shifting via VCRs, so 1978-84 figures may understate the actual numbers who watched PFT by excluding those watching later via off-air recordings.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Silvey, R. (1974) *Who's Listening? The Story of BBC Audience Research*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 179.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. 205-206.

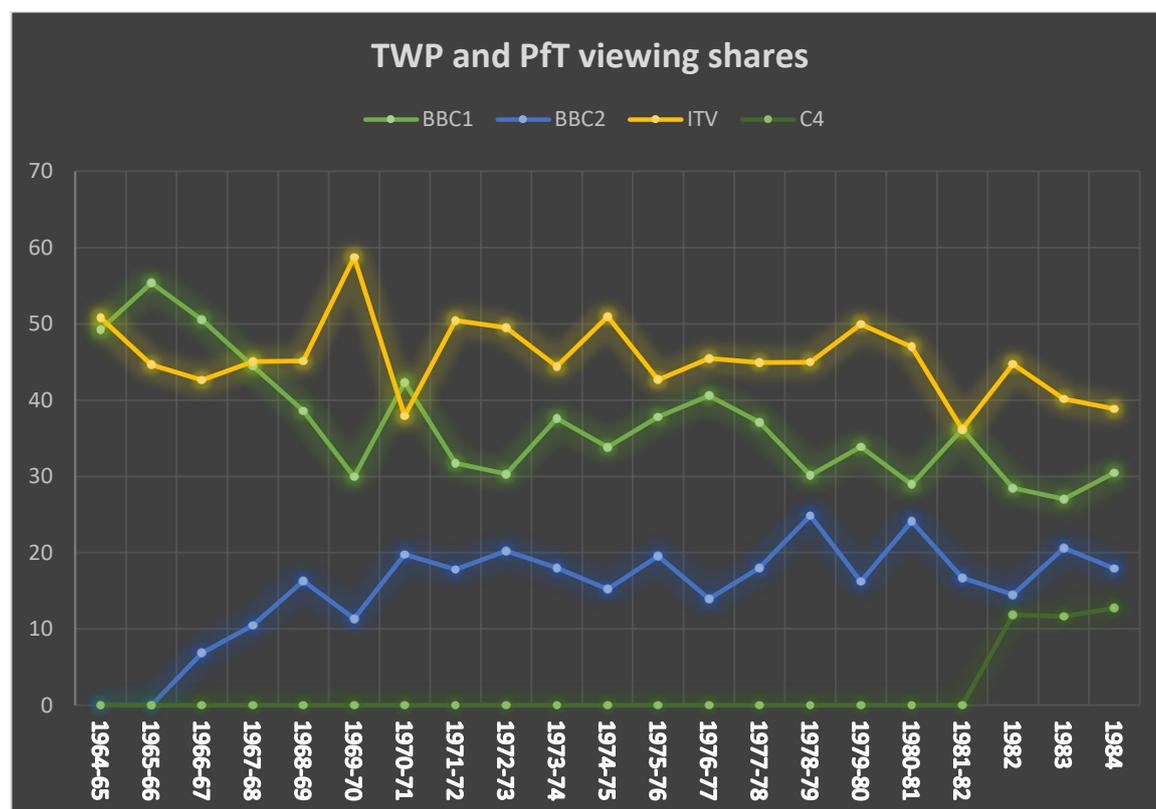
<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> BBC (1975) An Audience Research Report: 'Play for Today', Sep, 1.

<sup>148</sup> In autumn 1981, BARB began providing standardised daily viewing tabulations that replaced the BBC's Daily Viewing Barometers and ITV's rival TAM and JICTAR figures. Thus, it is worth noting that my figures from 1964-81 may perhaps understate the numbers who tuned into PFT, as I have not been able to trace JICTAR figures, so am not taking those into account. I use the BBC's ARD figures, which reflect attentiveness.

<sup>149</sup> Walker, J. (2022) *Rewind, Replay: Britain and the Video Boom, 1978-92*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 4-5, 18-21.

**Table 3.2. TWP and Pft’s audience viewing shares and those of other channels, 1964-84<sup>150</sup>**



4.1% of PftTs were watched by a fifth or higher of the UK population. Where 87% of TWP achieved an audience of 5 million or above, 60.9% of PftTs achieved this; while this was still a reasonable proportion, it did mark a significant historical decline in the consistency of the strand’s audience reach.<sup>151</sup> Only in 1975-77 did Pft manage consistently to obtain a higher audience than ITV, though 1981-82 saw a marked resurgence after the gradual decline of 1977-81. Pft’s low points in audience size were 1980-81, 1982-83 and, especially, 1972-73. However, even that latter series’ 4.12 million average – with a 24% audience share – would be perceived as reasonably strong for a BBC1 drama today.

In 1975, an estimated 7% of the UK population watched Pft ‘regularly’: suggesting there were 3.54 million loyal viewers.<sup>152</sup> A further 39% of the public would watch it ‘occasionally’, while 51% would never watch it – not due to antipathy, but being unable to watch TV during its time-slot or already being committed to programmes on other channels.<sup>153</sup> These figures imply a large pool of 19.7 million people who would occasionally tune into Pft depending on circumstances; in rare cases, like *SSS*, around half

<sup>150</sup> See Appendix 5 for an explanation of my methodology and the sources used to calculate viewing figures.

<sup>151</sup> Peter Anson regards the 4-5 million *The Garland* reached as ‘not bad’ for a Pft in 1981: Anson, P. (2021b) Interview with author, 19 Feb.

<sup>152</sup> BBC (1975) op. cit. 3.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid. 8.

of this number did; more often, *different* 10% segments of this pool of PfT viewing irregulars would watch.

The RSGB survey suggests no significant difference in the numbers of male and female viewers; *slightly* more women than men would watch PfT occasionally and fewer women would never watch.<sup>154</sup> There is a more significant age difference: a high 44% of those aged 16-44 would watch occasionally, whereas 54-58% of those aged 45 and over, who otherwise made up the largest group of regular PfT viewers, claimed never to watch it.<sup>155</sup>

In 1971, PfT was one of several programmes – *Civilisation* (1969), *Panorama*, *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* (1970) and a screening of Marcel Ophuls's film *The Sorrow and the Pity* (1969) – whose audience *share* of the 'upper-middle class' was two to three times that of 'working-class' viewers, whom, Basil Emmett reveals, were proportionately likelier to watch *Coronation Street* (1960- ), *Doctor at Large* (1971), *Top of the Pops* (1964-2021) and the Elvis Presley film *Tickle Me* (1965).<sup>156</sup> However, this data is based on a *single* 1971 repeat of Don Shaw's TWP *Sovereign's Company* (1970) under the PfT banner. In 1975, those in higher NRS social grades again tended to be more proportionately regular PfT viewers, but less markedly: 9% for AB to 6% for DE. This bears out the reality that PfT was a cross-class endeavour, including in its roster many working-class writers, actors and settings (see Chapter 5).

Furthermore, in raw numbers, working-class people actually *were* the majority of PfT's audience. According to the ARD's Daily Surveys of Listening and Viewing in April-May 1975, 65.5% of PfT's mean average audience was 'Working class', with 34.5% being 'Middle class'; the report claims that these groups made up 69.4 and 30.6% of the UK population respectively.<sup>157</sup> IPSOS Mori data estimates the 1975 UK population as being 64% working-class and 36% middle-class.<sup>158</sup> ARD data also suggests that, contradicting the RSGB Survey, women made up 58.8% of PfT's audience – a significant majority.<sup>159</sup>

Regionally, Scotland (8.9%), London and the South-East (8.3%) and the Midlands (7.9%) were better represented within PfT's audience, with Wales (6.4%) and the North (6.8 and

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Emmett, B.P. (1972) *The Television and Radio Audience in Britain*, in: D. McQuail (ed.) *Sociology of Mass Communications*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 214.

<sup>157</sup> BBC (1975) op. cit. 11.

<sup>158</sup> Arnett, G. (2016) UK became more middle class than working class in 2000, data shows, *Guardian*, 26 Feb [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2016/feb/26/uk-more-middle-class-than-working-class-2000-data> [accessed: 10/03/2021]

<sup>159</sup> BBC (1975) op. cit.

7%) under-represented.<sup>160</sup> Those aged 20-29 were the most *proportionately* likely PFT viewers, but the bulk of the audience – 72.6% – was over 30.<sup>161</sup> The oldest cohort was also the likeliest to describe PFT as being written ‘by famous writers of the past’; bafflingly, 21% believed this, probably confusing PFT with BBC1’s Play of the Month (1965-83) strand!<sup>162</sup>

General satisfaction with PFT was a high 53%, with only 17% ‘Not Satisfied’ with its dramas; however, levels of approval differed according to demography. A young (16-34 year old) working-class (DE) male, while certainly under-represented *proportionately* in PFT’s audience composition, was likeliest to be the *most* satisfied viewer – those with these characteristics gave satisfaction ratings of 57-59%. Such a viewer was also likelier to feel that PFT ‘keeps you happily entertained’, which may indicate how PFTs from 1972-75 by male writers with insight into working-class experience like Colin Welland, Peter Terson, Philip Martin, Peter McDougall and Willy Russell successfully appealed to these viewers on a regular basis.

The BBC’s intention behind the RSGB survey was to ascertain PFT’s identity or ‘image’; findings indicated that ‘some people do interpret’ PFT ‘as meaning rather more than just ‘this evening’s drama broadcast’’, seeing it as synonymous with realism.<sup>163</sup> Regular viewers selected what they felt were the truest six statements from a list of 17 that best described their expectations of a PFT: the most popular statement with 42% selecting it was ‘Plays which are true to life’.<sup>164</sup> A lower, but still significant, 20% felt PFTs ‘are so varied that you don’t know what to expect’, matching BBC TV’s then-Director of Programmes, Alasdair Milne’s emphasis on PFT’s variety and ‘heterogeneity’.<sup>165</sup>

For most regular and occasional PFT viewers, structure and clearly communicated storytelling superseded moral concerns: only 13% of viewers claimed that PFT featured ‘too much sex’.<sup>166</sup> Higher viewer responses of 23 and 21% expected PFTs would not have ‘a proper ending’ and ‘leave you feeling you haven’t understood them’.<sup>167</sup> This tallied with later findings that drama viewers ‘do look for a story rather than a slice of life’, desiring

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid. 4a.

<sup>163</sup> BBC (1975) *ibid.* 1; Anon (1977) Viewers’ reaction to BBC drama and comedy, *Television Today*, 7 Apr, 13. Trevor Griffiths’s *Through the Night* is termed the ‘most noteworthy’ 1975 PFT, exemplifying PFT’s realism.

<sup>164</sup> BBC (1975) *ibid.* 6.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

resolution and closure.<sup>168</sup> In 1975, the aforementioned critics' PFT-as-'depressing' discourse was not shared by PFT viewers, with just 8% agreeing that PFT leaves 'you feeling depressed'.<sup>169</sup>

More typically, viewers admired PFT's topicality, supporting Raymond Williams's perception in 1974 that dramatic representation was now 'a daily habit and a need' for viewers, who required images of 'what living is now like'.<sup>170</sup> 35% felt PFTs 'leave you feeling they were worth watching', while 31% felt they had 'a message about current social problems'.<sup>171</sup> Viewers valued PFT for being stimulating and challenging: 33% agreed that it gives 'you something to think about'.<sup>172</sup> According to the report, PFT's message-orientation meant the strand had an image of 'serious, realistic plays which tend to be viewed thoughtfully, with interest, but on the whole detachedly'.<sup>173</sup>

The ARD report had revealed that women viewers were less likely to identify with the characters in PFT, which may simply reflect its one-off nature compared with serial drama. However, in the six PFTs broadcast in April-May 1975, when the survey was completed, only 28% of total roles and a third of the top-three billed roles in the *Radio Times* were played by women. Besides being the likeliest to feel they could not understand PFT or that it lacked proper endings, women viewers' 'expectations of "sympathy" are sometimes not fulfilled' by PFT.<sup>174</sup> Considered more positively, this shows viewers interpreting PFTs according to certain writers', directors' and producers' Brechtian intention that audiences watch critically, relating what they saw to the world around them rather than getting emotionally involved. John Caughie thought that David Hare's *Dreams of Leaving* encouraged this distanced spectating, which Tessa Perkins saw as problematic for women viewers of another 'Art TV' PFT *The Imitation Game*.<sup>175</sup>

However, working-class DE viewers felt PFT provided 'plays about people you could sympathise with' to a greater degree than did those in AB, C1 or C2 social grades – suggesting their greater feelings of identification with, and recognition of, PFT's protagonists.<sup>176</sup> There is a significant gap in information concerning how working-class

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<sup>168</sup> Anon (1977) op. cit.

<sup>169</sup> BBC (1975) op. cit. 5.

<sup>170</sup> Williams, R. (2011) op. cit. 6.

<sup>171</sup> BBC (1975) op. cit. 4.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. 5. See Chapter 5 for more detailed analysis of PFT's gender representation.

<sup>175</sup> Caughie, J. (1981) Rhetoric, Pleasure and 'Art Television' – *Dreams of Leaving*, *Screen*, (22)4, 28-29; Perkins, T. (1984) Struggles over the Meaning of 'The Imitation Game', in: G. Hurd (ed.) *National Fictions: World War Two in British Films and Television*. London: BFI Publishing, 48.

<sup>176</sup> BBC ARD (1975) op. cit. 4.

women within this large audience segment felt.<sup>177</sup> Critic Mary Kenny loved Judy Forrest's *Only Children* (1984), a play with 'a lot of feeling and force', whose middle-class London characters she found recognisable and identified with: which illustrates PfT's empathetic shift in its later years towards middle-class protagonists.<sup>178</sup>

PfT's overall mean average audience Reaction Index (RI) was 58.6, based on 257 exact figures in BBC data, or that I have calculated, and five closely estimated; for 32 PfTs, figures were not recorded, or are yet to be traced. This average, fairly low compared with certain ongoing BBC series or serials, reflects PfT's inherent copiousness, variety and remit to challenge audiences; which is also reflected in its startling *range* of 57: the highest RI being 86, the lowest 29.<sup>179</sup> TWP's mean average RI was 55, so PfT showed an improvement in audience appreciation. It also compares well to *Doctor Who* (1963-89), 477 episodes of which have an RI/AI average of 58; like PfT, the BARB era saw a marked increase in scores (see Appendix 1B for TWP and PfT series-by-series breakdowns).

### **3.8. BBC Audience Research Reports: an invaluable record of 'everyday responses' and 'frameworks of expectation'**

Following sections provide historical analysis of viewers' feelings about PfT via a detailed analysis of BBC Audience Research Reports from 1970 to 1984, researched via the BBC Written Archives Centre. Firstly, I will explain the background of the BBC's Audience Research Department and how its Reports provide significant ways to recover, and help us understand, contemporary audiences' feelings about older TV dramas.

Billy Smart describes the BBC's Audience Research Reports as a valuable and useful 'record of everyday responses' to programmes that would otherwise be 'quickly forgotten and lost forever'.<sup>180</sup> The BBC Audience Research Department (ARD) was established by a small team headed by Robert Silvey in 1936; by 1960, it had grown to employ 100 staff and was based in the Langham building.<sup>181</sup> Aiming to provide more sophisticated and demographically representative information on how audiences were receiving BBC programmes, Silvey developed Audience Research Reports for radio, later adapted for TV:

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<sup>177</sup> While all of this analysis needs to be taken with caution given that the data provides one temporal snapshot, it *is* detailed enough to be analysed, judiciously, alongside the BBC's audience research reports.

<sup>178</sup> Kenny, M. (1984) Career girls are not immune to nappy rash, *Daily Mail*, 22 Aug, 19.

<sup>179</sup> 'Reaction Index' became 'Appreciation Index' in the BARB era.

<sup>180</sup> Smart, B. (2014a) The BBC Television Audience Research Reports, 1957-1979: Recorded Opinions and Invisible Expectations, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, (34)3, 455.

<sup>181</sup> Silvey (1974) op. cit. 196.

based initially on questionnaires from a sample which aimed to be a scale model of the UK population.<sup>182</sup>

Quantitative data was produced by asking listeners – and, later, viewers – to rate their enjoyment of a programme according to antithetical sets of statements or adjectives, using a five-point opinion scale from +2 to -2, with 0 neutral; later, this became A+ to C-.<sup>183</sup> Calculations provided a single percentage score for each programme, called a Reaction Index (RI).<sup>184</sup> This statistically robust snapshot of levels of audience appreciation for programmes replaced the BBC’s previous reliance on the postbag: among letter-writers the leisured, the better-educated, the lonely and those with stronger views were over-represented.<sup>185</sup> For PFT writers David Rudkin and Philip Martin, letters or other informal public reactions were infinitely more gratifying than quantitative data: showing that their work stimulated individual responses and impacting on people’s lives.<sup>186</sup> Indeed, Silvey saw the danger that the RI would simplify people’s uniqueness; to avoid representing viewers as ‘mere automata’, Silvey also included space in the questionnaire for listeners to record their qualitative reflections – though, clearly, their responses would be influenced by the BBC’s antithetical framings.<sup>187</sup>

Audience Research Reports were not carried out for every BBC programme: producers would ask for Reports, with the final selection being made in consultation with service editors.<sup>188</sup> The ARD produced Audience Research Reports for 160 of 169 Wednesday Plays and 228 of 294 PFTs: 94.7 and 77.6%, respectively.<sup>189</sup> This decline in Reports produced was gradual from 1978-82 and steepest during 1982-84, when only three of 32 PFTs received Reports. This reflected a wider decline in the numbers of ARRs produced for BBC departments, following the restructuring of the ARD when BARB was created in 1980 and the resulting new Broadcasting Research Department was given a remit to produce Reports and Appreciation Indices for *all* channels, including, later, Channel Four.

Silvey perceives audience expectations of wanting to be entertained by TV drama compared with radio drama: exemplified by the notably more negative reception for Christopher Fry’s verse drama *The Lady’s Not For Burning* when televised, compared with

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid. 29, 44-45, 58-59.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid. 146.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid. 67.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid. 29.

<sup>186</sup> Sandhu, S.S. (2014) *The Edge is Where the Centre Is: David Rudkin and Penda’s Fen: A Conversation*. London: Texte und Tone, 43; Martin, P. (2020) Interview with author, 17 Jun. Furthermore, Colin Welland and Ian McEwan engaged in discussions about their PFTs in the *Radio Times* letters’ pages.

<sup>187</sup> Silvey op. cit. 44-45, 199.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid. 118, 199.

<sup>189</sup> Data compiled from BBC WAC files.

its earlier Third Programme broadcast (both 1950).<sup>190</sup> This would have been affected by the more niche nature of the Third's audience, which was regularly patronised by 5% of the population, unlike TV drama's wider reach.<sup>191</sup> By 1974, the BBC had a 600-strong Viewing Panel in which members of the public would serve for 3-month periods, implying that a different 2,400 people would be involved yearly.<sup>192</sup>

Anticipating uses and gratifications theory and opposing deterministic media effects models, Silvey perceives the viewer as an active participant in the cultural exchange of TV, not a passive recipient: bringing into 'the encounter his [sic] prejudices, his tastes and his opinions – indeed the whole body of his experience'.<sup>193</sup> Billy Smart discerns frameworks of audience expectation, 'recurring patterns and formulations of praise and censure', contained within audience reports on 1970s TV drama theatre adaptations. Audiences desired elegance of language and décor, rich character acting, charm and an immersion in the life of a different era.<sup>194</sup> Smart perceives that viewers displayed 'a preoccupation with manners, the primacy of articulate verbal communication, and a continuity of class between the characters on screen and the viewer'.<sup>195</sup> Viewers sometimes explicitly expressed their preference for this sort of drama over contemporary dramas which contained 'swearing', 'hectoring left-wing politics' or incomprehensible experimentation.<sup>196</sup>

Smart explains how audiences watching historically-set TV dramas experienced a visual pleasure when acclaiming the accuracy of period settings, matched by 'clarity of storytelling'.<sup>197</sup> Drawing on Tracy Hargreaves's analysis of responses to *The Forsyte Saga*, Smart perceives viewers' escapist preference for John Galsworthy adaptation *Loyalties* (1976) over another of Cedric Messina's Play of the Month productions, Galsworthy's *Strife* (1975), whose depiction of historical strike action was too close for many viewers to disturbing present realities.<sup>198</sup> However, as Smart notes, viewers granted certain TV dramas more leeway with political material if the storyline was perceived as strong and the original historical drama *Days of Hope* (1975) was likelier to be judged by a set of expectations pertaining to cinematic realism.

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<sup>190</sup> Silvey op. cit. 163.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid. 159.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. 166.

<sup>194</sup> Smart, B. (2014a) op. cit. 459.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid. 460.

<sup>198</sup> Smart ibid.; Hargreaves, T. (2009) 'There's No Place Like Home': History and Tradition in *The Forsyte Saga* and the BBC, *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, (6)1, 21-40.

### **3.9. Audience discourses concerning PFT**

I have conducted detailed discourse analysis of the 38 Audience Research Reports from three equidistant points in PFT's run – series' 1, 7 and 15.<sup>199</sup> This analysis discerns that viewers largely inhabited the subject position BBC questionnaires suggested they adopt by justifying their levels of appreciation for PFT via strikingly recurrent arguments.<sup>200</sup>

Analysis reveals four dominant viewer discourses concerning their expectations of PFT, in ascending order of prevalence, from least to most expressed:

- insightful topicality
- comprehensibility
- entertainment
- realism

Clearly, these responses were influenced by the ARD questionnaire's framings. Indeed, series 1 ARRs even published quantitative percentages showing the sample's ratings of PFTs according to four or five binary descriptors: including 'Entertaining'/'Boring', 'Believable'/'Unbelievable' and, in May-June 1971, 'Very easy to understand'/'Very difficult to understand'.<sup>201</sup> The summarised or verbatim-quoted qualitative viewer responses rarely stray from these parameters, with occasional idiosyncratic departures. In addition, all ARRs contain opinions on the calibre of acting and production. Before investigating these primary discourses, two more minor but notable semantic patterns deserve attention.

#### **3.9.1. 'Lovely scenery' or 'all depressing from a visual angle': aesthetics and production style**<sup>202</sup>

Aesthetics and style figure tangentially in PFT's ARRs, but responses sometimes strongly accord with Billy Smart's perception of viewers' predilection for visual pleasure in period-based, theatre-adapting TV dramas. Realism was not always admired, as in viewers' distaste for the drabness of Philip Saville's hybrid, video-led aesthetic in *TLDPP*, which was later echoed in attacks on the all-filmed *TKOD*, which was 'all depressing from a purely visual angle, when scenes of the undertaker's everyday work were shown.'<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> 18 ARRs were produced for 1970-71 PFTs; in 1976-77 all 17 PFTs had ARRs; in 1984, just 3 had Reports.

<sup>200</sup> See Fairclough & Fairclough op. cit.

<sup>201</sup> BBC Audience Research Department (1970) Audience Research Report – Play for Today: The Long Distance Piano Player, 12 Nov, VR/70/514. ARRs are hitherto cited using their report numbers, but all are referenced fully in the Bibliography.

<sup>202</sup> VR/71/11; VR/77/23.

<sup>203</sup> VR/70/514; VR/77/23. However, this dislike of *TKOD*'s form reflects a wider distaste for its narrative and milieu.

However, filmed locations were often admired as having character or for their verisimilitude: those in *The Lie* added ‘reality’, whereas the island landscapes of *Orkney* (1971) were ‘dramatic’.<sup>204</sup> Filmed inserts in *Alma Mater* and *Hell’s Angel* gave audiences visual pleasure, with many admiring ‘lovely scenery’ in the former and how the latter situated its generational conflict theme within ‘superb [...] decorative shots of a country house furnished with art treasures [that] evidently gave the production [an] eye-catching [...] style’ that compensated viewers for a story they thought lacking.<sup>205</sup> In contrast to this *consolatory* function of real locations, videoed PFTs whose plots *were* enjoyed, *ADT* and *TCP*, benefited from ‘attractive’ studio-designed settings enjoyed *due to* their realism.<sup>206</sup> While some viewers acclaimed the ‘beauty’ of Hugo Charteris, Rhys Adrian, Tony Parker and Brian Clark’s writing, *The Lie* typified a ‘really beautiful’ production, set in affluent rural Dorset.<sup>207</sup> Sometimes, viewers admired PFTs aesthetically which showcased unfamiliar climes: the scenery in *Orkney* was ‘beautifully photographed’, while ‘the beauty’ of *Your Man*’s County Sligo locations ‘captivated many’.<sup>208</sup>

Viewers saw the use of filmed exterior inserts in a graveyard in *HAF* (1970) and the all-filmed period locations in *SSS* as establishing an ‘authentic’ ambience.<sup>209</sup> As with *TLDPP* and *TKOD*, this verisimilitude was sometimes received ambivalently: the non-naturalistic *The Foxtrot* won ‘occasional praise’ for ‘the authenticity of sets and costumes’, but as many viewers disliked its mundanity: ‘location: bed, pub, living room, bed, street, garden, bed’.<sup>210</sup> This tiredness with humdrum ‘kitchen sink’ aesthetics was comparatively absent concerning later PFTs, where local specificity was overtaking identikit mundanity. ‘[S]everal viewers’ appreciated Alma Cullen’s Edinburgh-set *Degree of Uncertainty* for its ‘use of locations [...] especially those who live in the area’.<sup>211</sup> This PFT, shot in real locations using OB video, counters arguments for film being integral to this visual pleasure of recognition.

Music, seldom used in PFT, especially in 1976-77 (see Chapter 2), is, unsurprisingly, neglected within the ARRs. In series 1, Marc Wilkinson’s music in *The Lie* was perceived as ‘too loud’, drowning out the dialogue, while Fiachra Trench’s piano-playing in *TLDPP*

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<sup>204</sup> VR/70/541; VR/71/177.

<sup>205</sup> VR/71/11; VR/71/36.

<sup>206</sup> VR/70/591; VR/77/240.

<sup>207</sup> VR/71/36; VR/71/151; VR/71/162; VR/77/240; VR/70/451

<sup>208</sup> VR/71/177; VR/76/622.

<sup>209</sup> VR/70/604; VR/77/150.

<sup>210</sup> VR/71/151.

<sup>211</sup> VR/79/117. This suggests that Edinburgh residents made up at least 2% of the 131 Viewing Panellists who reported on this play!

was widely seen as ‘irritating’.<sup>212</sup> Stephen Deutsch’s music for *Come the Revolution* (1977), which fuses Theatre Workshop agit-prop with rock and folk styles was divisive: ‘lively’ for some, but ‘disliked’ by more who resented the play’s focus on the Plumber’s Mates: a callow, Midlands-based left-wing theatre troupe.<sup>213</sup>

Viewers praised PFT’s marshalling of studio sets and filmed locations for its ‘authenticity’ in establishing the ‘atmosphere’ of specific places and times. Several admired the generally maligned *ICSMLW* for how director Alan Clarke distilled this video-led hybrid’s Margate seaside ambience.<sup>214</sup> Similarly, many felt that director James Ferman’s ‘alert and fluid camerawork’ in *When the Bough Breaks* (1971) (*WTBB*) ‘set the final seal of authority upon a very convincing play’.<sup>215</sup> Series 7 viewers liked how filmed locations in *TEG*, *Your Man* and *SSS* evoked a realistic atmosphere, alongside designed studio sets in videoed PFTs.<sup>216</sup> They loved the designs Barrie Dobbins, Susan Spence, Oliver Bayldon and Richard Henry produced for *Rocky Marciano is Dead* (1976) (*RMID*), *Housewives’ Choice* (1976), *A Choice of Evils* and *TCP*, respectively, while *LOAG* was praised for its use of period costumes and newsreel.<sup>217</sup> Viewers’ aversion to *Desert* was much down to its ‘feeling of unreality’: people judging its sets against their expectations of realism.<sup>218</sup>

The then-dominant VS aesthetic was as often perceived as synonymous with well-crafted realism as film. Linking to the critics’ discourse of PFT as realist Art, viewers extolled designer Allan Anson’s ‘very authentic railway compartments’ for the experimental *Buffet* alongside his ‘imagination’.<sup>219</sup> The relatively few aesthetic complaints concerned videoed or video-led PFTs: Stephen Murray’s make-up in *A Choice of Evils* and the ‘unnaturally quiet’ NHS hospital corridors in *OFAB*, whose ‘extremely authentic’ natural birth sequences are, contrastingly, filmed. Viewer acclaim is notably absent for the claustrophobic domestic or school set designs by Don Taylor (*DAIS*), Tony Abbott (*A Photograph*) and Susan Spence – whose design of *Gotcha* is especially outstanding – reflecting lukewarm or uneasy reactions to the plays themselves.<sup>220</sup>

Viewers received more experimental PFTs sceptically, whatever their aesthetic, but occasionally, would admire studio modernism. While some found Philip Saville’s visuals

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<sup>212</sup> VR/70/541; VR/70/514.

<sup>213</sup> VR/77/587.

<sup>214</sup> VR/70/580.

<sup>215</sup> VR/71/162. Ferman was later an authoritative arbiter of screen culture when Secretary of the BBFC, 1975-99.

<sup>216</sup> VR/76/586; VR/76/622; VR/77/150.

<sup>217</sup> VR/76/555; VR/76/601; VR/77/226; VR/77/240; VR/77/8.

<sup>218</sup> TV/84/52.

<sup>219</sup> VR/76/638.

<sup>220</sup> VR/77/52; VR/77/164; VR/77/209.

in *O Fat White Woman* ‘too clever by half’ and Colin Bucksey’s electronic backgrounds and CSO in *The After Dinner Joke* (1978) ‘intrusive and distracting’, there was appreciation for Delia Derbyshire’s ‘evocative’ electronic music in the former and the latter’s novel use of cartoons.<sup>221</sup> A larger group of viewers admired how, in *The Cheviot, The Stag and The Black, Black Oil* (1974) (*The Cheviot*), director John Mackenzie’s filming of a theatrical audience watching the actors’ performance had created a great ‘rapport’.<sup>222</sup>

Viewers regarded *Carson Country* (1972) as a ‘realistic and perceptive study’ of the Northern Irish Troubles’ roots in 1912, though one ‘group’ in the panel admired its ‘very effective’, non-naturalistic scene-changing technique, where director Piers Haggard’s camera moved dexterously from one set to another within shots.<sup>223</sup> However, Haggard’s modernist theatricality was appreciated, alongside the acting, via a realism discourse, as ‘very convincing’.<sup>224</sup> Contrastingly, 12 years later, Haggard’s *Desert* was criticised as ‘The desert location was apparently so false that it spoilt the total effect by creating a feeling of unreality [...] the production looked as if no-one was concerned with quality’.<sup>225</sup> Viewers failed to recognise, or appreciate, Haggard’s innovative film-video hybrid style: often cutting between FL interiors and VS exteriors, or how Stuart Walker’s deliberately minimalist desert set was underscored by John Chowning’s haunting electronic music.

### 3.9.2. ‘I don’t want this rubbish shown in my home’<sup>226</sup>: permissiveness, language and class

A small, if persistent, minority section of PFT’s audience expressed moral concerns with its representation of language and behavioural mores, echoing Mary Whitehouse’s conservative Christian National Viewers’ and Listeners’ Association, a vocal campaigning organisation purporting to represent Middle England’s ‘silent majority’, but who were actually a self-selecting minority of around 15,000 people.<sup>227</sup> During 1970-81, Whitehouse or other NVLA members criticised *at least* 20 PFTs, most regularly for strong language, and, occasionally, sexual and violent content (see Figure 3.1 for characteristic monitoring

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<sup>221</sup> VR/71; VR/78/83.

<sup>222</sup> VR/74/347.

<sup>223</sup> VR/72/626.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> TV/84/52.

<sup>226</sup> VR/71/25.

<sup>227</sup> Prestidge, J. (2019) Housewives having a go: Margaret Thatcher, Mary Whitehouse and the appeal of the Right Wing Woman in late twentieth-century Britain, *Women’s History Review*, (28)2, 279. Prestidge notes that Whitehouse claimed there were 15,000 members in 1975.

of ‘verbal compost’).<sup>228</sup> After Michael Swann’s laconic dismissal of their criticism of the 1975 repeat of *Shutdown* (1973), the NVLA subsequently gained in influence, boasting of their role in halting the transmissions of *Brimstone and Treacle* and *Scum* and the planned 1978 repeat of *Gotcha*, which they saw as ‘one long obscene gesture’.<sup>229</sup> They showed their right-wing politics in arguing that *Leeds United!* and *United Kingdom* were ‘irresponsible’ broadcasts, due to their left-wing ideology, and used racist discourses to attack *Victims of Apartheid*, claiming that ‘the truth’ of its scenes of Vorster’s Apartheid regime’s torture of Black South Africans ‘is irrelevant’ (see Figure 3.2).<sup>230</sup> The NVLA’s bigotry extended to a marked aversion to PFT’s ‘offensive’ representations of lesbianism and male homosexuality, which they saw as improper subjects for TV.<sup>231</sup>

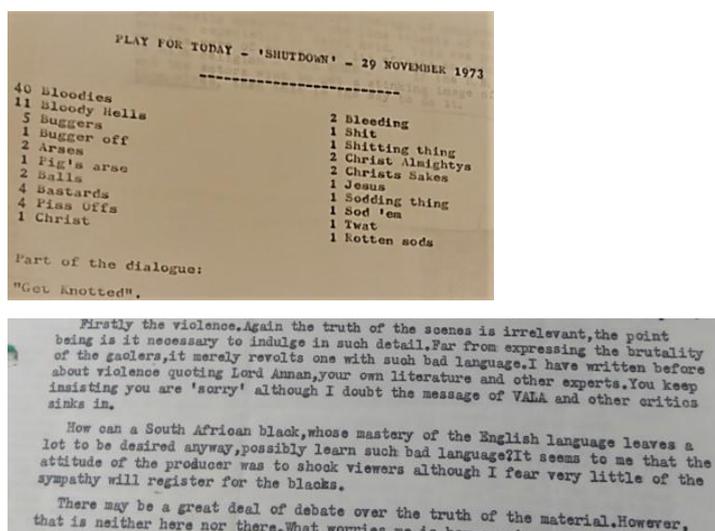


Figure 3.1. Extract from Mary Whitehouse letter, about *Shutdown*. Figure 3.2. Extract from A.R. Burston letter, discussing *Victims of Apartheid* (1978).<sup>232</sup>

<sup>228</sup> The 20 PFTs identified as NVLA targets thus far are: *The Lie* (1970), *Angels Are So Few* (1970), *Michael Regan* (1971), *Just Your Luck* (1972), *The Operation* (1973), *Shutdown* (1973), *Baby Blues* (1973), *Leeds United!* (1974), *Gangsters* (1975), *The Saturday Party* (1975), *The Other Woman* (1976), *Double Dare* (1976), *Do As I Say* (1977), *Gotcha* (1977), *Nipper* (1977), *Victims of Apartheid* (1978), *Coming Out* (1979), *Comedians* (1979), *Thicker than Water* (1980) and *United Kingdom*. PFTs that the NVLA commended in the same period were *Clay*, *Smeddum and Greenden* (1976) and *Our Flesh and Blood* (1977). This list has been compiled using the BBC WAC’s NVLA correspondence files, newspaper archives and Thompson, B. (ed.) (2012) *Ban This Filth! Letters from the Mary Whitehouse archive*. London: Faber and Faber, 156-157, 355-358.

<sup>229</sup> Swann, M. (1975) Letter to Mary Whitehouse 18 Jul. BBC WAC, R/78/2348; Anon (1978b) “GOTCHA”: The BBC has Second Thoughts, *The Viewer and Listener*, Oct, 1. Swann tells Whitehouse that, ‘although we naturally give thought to the views your members express from time to time, I cannot regard them as entirely representative of the public at large’.

<sup>230</sup> Whitehouse, M. (1974) Letter to Michael Swann, 5 Nov. BBC WAC, R/78/2348; Anon (1981), Briefly, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 10 Dec, 2. Labour MP and junior minister William Price claimed that Whitehouse’s censorial response to *Leeds United!* ‘strayed from the comical to the dangerous’: Anon (1974) Whitehouse in Witch-Hunt – MP, *Daily Mirror*, 6 Nov, 10.

<sup>231</sup> Kippax, J. (1976) Letter to Charles Curran, 26 Mar. BBC WAC, R/78/2348; Thompson op. cit. 355-358. Janet Kippax claims to speak on behalf of the NVLA’s Ipswich branch.

<sup>232</sup> Whitehouse, M. (1975) Letter to Michael Swann, 9 Jul, BBC WAC, R/78/2348; Burston, A.R. (1978) Letter to BBC Television, 25 Oct, BBC WAC, R/78/2348.

More widely, PFT's moralistic audience segment, can, from the ARRs, be estimated as comprising a mere 5-15% of PFT's regular audience. This group morally censured many series 1 PFTs: 'a sizeable minority' felt Dennis Potter's *Angels* was 'degrading and disgusting', 'depraved' and 'wicked', Douglas Livingstone's *ICSMLW* was 'vulgar'; a fifth of the large audience for Bowen's *Robin Redbreast* found it 'repellent', 'distasteful' and 'disgusting'.<sup>233</sup> Some disliked the 'crudeness of the humour' in *Orkney*'s second story, 'The Whaler's Return', which depicted a bawdy wedding ritual; however, 'many welcomed the contrast' provided by such 'piquant humour'.<sup>234</sup> Scales of disaffection differed. While 'One or two' complained of an 'unnecessarily embarrassing' scene of a spitting contest in *Alma Mater*, 'Roughly half the sample were, to varying degrees, bored, angered or disgusted' by W. Stephen Gilbert's confrontational *Circle Line*, which epitomised how TWP's iconoclastic ethos lingered on within certain early PFTs.<sup>235</sup>

Series 7 PFTs which featured commonplace subjects like birth and death offended moralists' sense of decorum. 'Some' viewers felt that *TKOD*'s scenes of an undertaker's everyday work 'must have been distressing to all newly bereaved' and that featuring a dead baby was 'gratuitous'.<sup>236</sup> Bafflingly, 'a few' viewers found 'the bedroom and birth scenes' in Stott's comedy *OFAB* 'excessively realistic or even offensive'.<sup>237</sup> There were 'fairly frequent' criticisms of the 'coarse language and, indeed, sordid storyline' of Keeffe's *Gotcha* and some described the docudrama *SSS* as a 'dreadful and degrading story better left unsaid'.<sup>238</sup> More understandably to sensibilities in 2022, 10% of viewers of *DAIS* were deeply upset by the play's opening rape sequence being 'unnecessarily explicit and revolting'.<sup>239</sup>

'Quite a number' felt that language uttered in *Angels* was 'filthy'; likewise, many antagonistic viewers found *The Foxtrot*'s language 'putrid', though just 'one or two' objected to *TRAF*'s 'bad language'.<sup>240</sup> By series 7, 'offensive', 'crude' or 'coarse' language drew offence in proportionately *more* PFTs: *Buffet*, *TEG*, *DAIS*, *Gotcha* and *SSS*, about which 'a number' complained of 'an excessive amount of swearing'.<sup>241</sup> Small numbers complained of the language in *ACTTFB* being 'too foul at times'.<sup>242</sup> Notably,

<sup>233</sup> VR/70/553; VR/70/580; VR/70/615.

<sup>234</sup> VR/71/177. Viewers were more unified in enjoying its 'moving and human' stories 'A Time to Keep' and 'Celia'.

<sup>235</sup> VR/71/11; VR/71/25.

<sup>236</sup> VR/77/23

<sup>237</sup> VR/77/36.

<sup>238</sup> VR/77/209; VR/77/150.

<sup>239</sup> VR/77/52.

<sup>240</sup> VR/70/553; VR/71/151; VR/71/190.

<sup>241</sup> VR/76/638; VR/76/586; VR/77/52; VR/77/209; VR/77/150.

<sup>242</sup> TV/84/34.

these complaints are levied against Adrian's experimental comedy, Potter's modernist drama and McDougall's and Keffe's heightened social realism. Generally, a critical mass within PFT's audience granted Allen's *TRAF*, Rosenthal's *SSS* and Reid's *ACTTFB* greater latitude due to enjoying their documentarian realism, as evidenced by their high RIs.

Violence seldom troubled viewers. A 'small group [of viewers] heartily disapproved' of *Gangsters*, the most demonstrably violent of PFTs, but this was only 15% of the sample; a further 20% felt it was necessary, as writer Philip Martin's theme explored 'the darker, animal aspects of society'.<sup>243</sup> A viewer saw Martin's hard-hitting drama as 'infinitely better than anything in the same vein from America', which implicitly articulates a national cultural pride in PFT's patented tough realism.<sup>244</sup> A similarly 'small group' objected to husband Andrew's domestic attack on his wife Anna in *The Lie*, while the outbursts of violence in *Gotcha* polarised viewers more.<sup>245</sup> Somewhat more commonly, viewers appreciated PFT's sensitive and restrained depictions of violence: during the industrial dispute in *TRAF*, which was inspired by real events in St Helens, and the effect of the Troubles on a young boy from Belfast's Falls Road in *Your Man*.<sup>246</sup>

'Several' viewers found *The Lie*, Bergman's story of adultery, 'too sexy', though others thought the sex scenes well-handled, while Dennis Potter's *Angels* was attacked for a 'boring' bedroom scene and being 'the usual sexy trash'.<sup>247</sup> Some saw the 'bizarre' juxtaposition of 'death and marital sex' in *HAF* as 'in very bad taste'.<sup>248</sup> However, 'many' viewers admired actors' performances of sexually forceful women: Christine Hargreaves in *Angels* as 'the bored wife' Cynthia, who seduces Tom Bell's angel and Gemma Jones in *The Man in the Sidecar* (1971) as 'the inscrutable novelist' Edith.<sup>249</sup> However, a section of viewers clearly preferred the political melodrama *ADT to Circle Line*, an exploratory drama of student disaffection. Viewers praise the former as 'a good play where sex was not exploited; a breath of fresh air; let's have more', implicitly championing it against Bergman and Potter's previous PFTs.<sup>250</sup> Contrastingly, *Circle Line*, which features scenes of cannabis usage and underage sex, prompted one viewer to ask: 'are there no areas of sordid behaviour that can remain unmentioned?'<sup>251</sup> While the pejorative adjective 'sordid' was used about other PFTs that received middling or divisive reactions – *The Man in the*

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<sup>243</sup> VR/75/31.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> VR/70/541; VR/77/209.

<sup>246</sup> VR/71/190; VR/76/622.

<sup>247</sup> VR/70/541; VR/70/553.

<sup>248</sup> VR/70/604.

<sup>249</sup> VR/70/553; VR/71/205.

<sup>250</sup> VR/70/591.

<sup>251</sup> VR/71/25.

*Sidecar* (RI 54) and *Gotcha* (55) – this minority articulation did not impede wider enjoyment of *The Lie* (67) and *Gangsters* (73).<sup>252</sup>

One moralistic viewer of *Circle Line* urged playwrights to ‘realise that the majority of viewers are sick of sex and drugs. If we want to see an “X” film we’ll go and see it, but I don’t want this rubbish shown in my home’.<sup>253</sup> Such viewers were thankful for *ADT* as ‘at least [it] was normal, with ordinary characters’, thereby implying that adulterers, including the sex-starved wife Cynthia in *Angels* and *Circle Line*’s disaffected students Tim and Louise were distasteful dramatic personae invading viewers’ domestic propriety.<sup>254</sup> To a degree, PFT subsequently allayed such viewers’ concerns over sex: in 1976-77, there were merely ‘scattered criticisms of the emphasis on sex and drink’ in *Buffet* and ‘a number’ who complained of ‘the nude sex scenes’ in *SSS*.<sup>255</sup>

However, in contrast to the impression that a critical mass of PFT viewers watched analytically and detachedly, the ARRrS show instances where a group of viewers aberrantly decoded PFT in consistently taking strong personal dislikes to certain characters and behaviours. For some, the pair of unemployed men in *TEG* were ‘unlikeable’; that this accompanied complaints about their ‘difficult [...] broad’ accents shows that certain viewers reacted against on-screen representations of identities ‘Other’ than their own.<sup>256</sup> A viewer of Mike Leigh’s *TKOD*, another non-metropolitan, slice-of-life drama, made a partial and offhand criticism of junior undertaker Trevor (David Threlfall) as being ‘mentally subnormal’.<sup>257</sup>

PFT’s spring 1977 double-bill illustrates audience subjectivity and defensiveness over class identity. Brian Clark’s *Campion’s Interview* was regarded as ‘much more realistic and acceptable to watch’, as it depicts a heated but civilised cross-class debate concerning educational organisation and standards, in contrast to its predecessor, Barrie Keeffe’s *Gotcha*, whose ‘whole concept’ some found ‘disturbing’.<sup>258</sup> Keeffe fuses gritty realism with disaster thriller tropes, as a schoolboy holds three teachers hostage in a stock cupboard. The Kid (Philip Davis) uses threatening actions and language, while his middle-class teacher Ton (Gareth Thomas) expresses his pent-up class rage against the Kid in a

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<sup>252</sup> VR/71/205; VR/77/209; VR/70/541; VR/75/31.

<sup>253</sup> VR/71/25.

<sup>254</sup> VR/70/591.

<sup>255</sup> VR/76/638; VR/77/150.

<sup>256</sup> VR/76/586.

<sup>257</sup> VR/77/23.

<sup>258</sup> VR/77/209.

torrent of harsh invective and violently assaults him at the climax, which may have touched raw nerves in certain professional middle-class viewers.

Furthermore, some viewers of *DAIS* were untroubled by the play's surprisingly 'tasteful' treatment of rape, acclaiming how 'even the rape scene was delightfully handled, with an absence of crudity'.<sup>259</sup> Less problematically, one viewer was uncomfortably alert to Charles Wood's acerbic characterisation in his satirising of reactions to rape: 'a more unpleasant group of people I've never seen'.<sup>260</sup> Some viewers of Brian Clark's surer-footed, well-received *TCP* objected to the 'snobbery of the characters and their basic unpleasantness'; some among the working-class majority of PFT viewers may have resented how Clark foregrounds an affluent Surrey middle-class milieu led by stockbroker-turned-restaurantier Richard Elkinson and depicts his working-class employees stealing from him.<sup>261</sup> However, the play gained an RI of 70, while *DAIS* obtained only 42. Clark's satirising of his cross-class milieu went down better with viewers, being warm and nuanced compared to Wood's prickly, nihilistic tone.

Whether viewers *identified* with or were *repelled* by protagonists was important to the reception of *SSS*, the PFT which attained the strand's highest ever audience. 'Some' judged the Nicholsons' 'selfishness and recklessness and the utter disregard for other people', rejecting the play's preferred reading, which, as director John Goldschmidt clarifies, concerns Vivian's 'social revenge'.<sup>262</sup> However, somewhat more viewers admired how Susan Littler performed Vivian's 'gutsy' quality, 'to which one could not remain indifferent'.<sup>263</sup>

Overall, the ARRs reveal that, while moralistic concerns were persistently advocated by a small, vocal minority, the vast majority of PFT's viewers did not share the NVLA's dogmatism. They were closer to critic Shaun Usher's enlightened humanism or the mildly libertarian working-class *Mirror* reader who Mary Malone wrote for.

### 3.9.3. Topical insights into problems, issues and the cultural Other

As outlined previously, many PFT viewers liked how the strand provided insights into topical issues and unfamiliar communities. For instance, Jack Rosenthal's *BMB* 'provided an insight' into the Jewish ceremonial rite of passage.<sup>264</sup> 1976-84 PFTs featuring

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<sup>259</sup> VR/77/52.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> VR/77/240.

<sup>262</sup> VR/77/150. Goldschmidt, J. (2020) Interview with author, 22 May. Goldschmidt likens this to the 'social anger' that Jack Nicholson personified on screen in Hollywood cinema.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> VR/76/518.

communities less common in TV drama – *The Happy Hunting Ground*, *Waterloo Sunset*, *Beyond the Pale*, *The Garland* and *King* – received RIs of 58-77, all achieving or exceeding PFT’s overall mean RI. While Tom Hadaway’s former play elicited scattered incomprehensibility discourses, it was widely praised for its ‘lovely authentic accents’ and North Shields locations – ‘one could almost smell the sea’ – and for providing ‘a marvellous insight into the fish trade and those who work in it’.<sup>265</sup> Like *BMB*, Hadaway’s play found favour in how it depicted an unfamiliar community within a ‘well-made’ narrative; its considerable audience of 8.8 million was also surely aided by the vogue for North East England representations created by *When the Boat Comes In* (1976-81).

Viewing panellists were not quite as focused as critics on PFT’s issue-based topicality, but the fact that they do raise it, when it is not part of the ARD’s questionnaire prompts, shows its power. A small audience segment, which, adapting Michael Frayn’s phrase, might be termed the ‘herbivore’ vanguard, received PFT in a gently ruminative way, appreciating its *relevance*.<sup>266</sup> In series 1 alone, *TLDPP* was received as a ‘new angle on a human problem’ – the ‘rat race’ of work – *Angels* as ‘very much a play of today and about today’s problems’ and *HAF* as depicting a marriage going through a ‘problem stage’.<sup>267</sup> *Hell’s Angel* was a ‘well-observed study’ of rebellious youth, while *WTBB* ‘faced up to a very sore social problem’ of domestic violence against children.<sup>268</sup>

Such discourses declined by series 7. Amid a broadly negative reaction, *BYL* was admired as a documentary-like presentation of ‘a very real social problem’ – gambling addiction – while *Gotcha* ‘summed up all the problems and frustrations inherent in our present-day schools when they are far too large and impersonal’ and *Campion’s Interview* illustrated the ‘problems to be faced in education today’.<sup>269</sup> While series 15’s sparser range of ARRs makes it hard to assess, the discourse continued: Graham Reid’s *ACTTFB* was ‘about the problems of an emotionally and geographically divided Belfast family’ and was received enthusiastically, *especially* among the C2 social grade of skilled manual workers, reflecting a working-class preference for plays centring on topical problems filtered through familial representation.<sup>270</sup> In Reid’s play, the Troubles mainly loom in the background (see Chapter 4). Notably more viewers in the DE social grade – semi-skilled,

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<sup>265</sup> VR/76/78.

<sup>266</sup> Frayn, M. (1964) Festival, in: M. Sissons & P. French (eds.) *Age of Austerity 1945-51*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 331.

<sup>267</sup> VR/70/514; VR/70/553; VR/70/604.

<sup>268</sup> VR/71/36; VR/71/162.

<sup>269</sup> VR/76/532; VR/77/209.

<sup>270</sup> TV/84/34. Unfortunately, PFT’s three 1984 audience reports do not clarify the proportions of PFT’s audience made up by the AB, C1, C2 and DE demographics.

unskilled manual and casual workers and non-workers – found Leslie Stewart’s *The Amazing Miss Stella Estelle* (1984) (*TAMSE*) to be entertaining and a ‘good production’ compared with middle-class ABC1 viewers, who were likelier to admire Elaine Lordan’s acting but also far likelier to be bored by a play concerning exploitation within a working-class family and a social club.<sup>271</sup>

Writer Colin Welland’s *THH* was deeply appreciated for promoting empathy, while exposing cynicism, hardness and the lack of understanding by the police and the wider community in dealing with ‘Henry Tobias Jones’ (Tony Calvin), a man with mental health problems.<sup>272</sup> Emphasising Welland’s radicalism and the limitations in understanding of mental health in 1970, one complacent viewer criticised Welland’s ridiculing of authority and how he had presented Henry’s maladjustment. Subjective dislike of a play’s subject-matter and characters sometimes illuminated its topical charge. For one viewer, if *Circle Line* ‘reflected, even to a small degree, the attitudes, reasoning behaviour and life of students today, it is no wonder we have generation gaps’.<sup>273</sup> The many viewers who hated Gilbert’s play, centring on a complicated student Tim (Michael Feast), criticised it thus: ‘If this is how students carry on, no wonder the country is in such a mess; educating such as these is a waste of money’.<sup>274</sup>

*WTBB*, the PFT with the highest RI of all – 86 – gained widespread admiration for *not* taking sides in a culture war, unlike *Circle Line*. Many hailed *WTBB* as ‘a welcome change’, in being a PFT featuring an ‘attractive, young social worker’ Margaret, who contrasts with Les Blair’s and Mike Leigh’s scathing satirical representations of unimaginative, limited social workers in three improvisational 1976-82 PFTs.<sup>275</sup> While ‘a few’ thought Parker was too ‘soft’ on the parents Eddie and Sheila Gosse, the vast majority admired his humanist even-handedness with his characters and how the play did not preach or moralise. Some viewers even appreciated a PFT which elicited mixed reactions, Roy

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<sup>271</sup> TV/84/116. Male DE viewers aged 35-54 were likeliest to appreciate the characters, storyline and interesting theme of *Desert of Lies*, though female C2 viewers aged 12-34 were readiest to find it a boring, poor production. However, they persisted with it compared with ABC1 Women aged 55+, who were most inclined to switch off. TV/84/52.

<sup>272</sup> VR/70/627. As David Rolinson notes, we only discover his real identity as David Williams near the end: Rolinson, D. (2005) *The Television Series: Alan Clarke*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 29-32.

<sup>273</sup> VR/71/25.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.* Gilbert claims that he didn’t intend Tim to be a ‘representative’, nor to write about nihilism and disaffection. Yet, Tim’s reception by Peter Fiddick as a ‘moral blank-sheet’, by Henry Raynor as ‘a good old-fashioned nihilist’ and by Seán Day-Lewis as ‘a glimpse into how some students comport themselves, and why’ shows critics’ central role in shaping PFT’s meanings. Gilbert, W.S. (2021) Email to author, 7 Mar. Fiddick, P. (1971a) The Money Programme on BBC-2, *Guardian*, 15 Jan, 10; Raynor, H. (1971) The Circle Line (BBC 1), *Times*, 15 Jan, 10; Day-Lewis, S. (1971a) *op. cit.*

<sup>275</sup> VR/71/162.

Kendall's *Housewives' Choice*, feeling it was 'good to see two extremes of housewives fully aired, and very fairly portrayed'.<sup>276</sup>

Other less well-regarded PFTs like *Doran's Box* (1976) and *Schmoedipus* (1974) were, nevertheless, compared by vanguard viewers to Pinter who praised its thought-provoking quality.<sup>277</sup> *The After Dinner Joke*, exposing charity and business links, was credited as an 'unusual idea', while 15% of viewers liked Ron Hutchinson's pseudo-Beckettian *The Last Window Cleaner* (1979) for its scattergun 'black humour' and being a 'thought-provoking' look at Belfast.<sup>278</sup> Modernist PFTs by Dominic Behan and John McGrath were more widely valued for providing insights into motivations for Ulster nationalism, Irish republicanism and Scottish nationalism.<sup>279</sup>

#### 3.9.4. 'I am heartily sick of weird plays with little or no plot': comprehensibility or experimentation?<sup>280</sup>

There was a significant amount of pejorative criticism of PFT's narratives for their 'weirdness' or fragmentation, offending audience expectations of clarity.<sup>281</sup> In 1970-71, ARRr contained 2.9 discourses of comprehensibility per report, falling to 2.5 in 1976-77, but increasing to 4.3 in 1984. The slight decline in frequency of this mostly negative discourse during series 7 indicates how PFT shifted back to 'well-made' narrative structures, while the increase in series 15 reflected antipathy towards the modernist *Desert*, with the realistic *ACTTFB* being markedly preferred.

The main specific complaint was of PFTs having 'no point', being 'aimless', bewildering, difficult to follow or understand; viewers sometimes expressed their explicit desire for the author to provide a clear, singular and tangible meaning. In addition, there were perceptions that PFTs had 'no plot' or lacked narrative coherence. Series 7 has a higher incidence of 'no plot' compared with 'no point', while, in series 1, 40% of PFTs were described with a discourse of structural confusion: 'bitty', 'puzzling' or 'muddled', whereas, during series 7, viewers indicted 35% of PFTs for poor narrative or character development or inconclusive endings. For instance, Bowen's *A Photograph* was less appreciated than his previous *Robin Redbreast*, as many viewers felt 'cheated' by its conclusion.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> VR/76/601.

<sup>277</sup> VR/76/36; VR/74/375.

<sup>278</sup> VR/79/81.

<sup>279</sup> TV/72/626; VR/74/347.

<sup>280</sup> VR/71/25.

<sup>281</sup> See VR/76/638 for an especially characteristic example.

<sup>282</sup> VR/77/164.

In series 1, the inverse discourse acclaiming straightforward plots and understandable, meaningful stories occurs nine times, whereas this only occurs four times in series 7; occasionally, a PFT being understandable was negatively perceived, if this meant over-familiar storytelling: the stale *Everybody Say Cheese* bored more viewers than the polarising *The Man in the Sidecar*.<sup>283</sup> PFT always included traditional and experimental structures; each had their supporters; however, the prevalence of the ‘no point’-‘no plot’ discourse indicates that more viewers preferred their PFTs ‘well-made’ than belonged to the pro-experimental vanguard. Both series 1 and series 7 saw an *occasional* positive discourse of ‘experimentation’: in each there are five instances of the adjectives ‘unusual’, ‘different’, ‘imaginative’, ‘clever’, ‘intriguing’ and ‘off beat’, and the noun ‘experiment’, elaborating on the ARD’s questionnaire descriptor ‘out-of-the-ordinary’. The pejorative flipside discourse of ‘weird’, ‘bizarre’ or ‘too strange or unreal’ occurs four times in series 1, typified by how half of viewers reacted to the most divisive PFT of all, *Circle Line*, which received exceptionally high A+ and C- scores: ‘I am heartily sick of weird plays with little or no plot’.<sup>284</sup> This ‘weird and surrealist’ discourse occurs just once in series 7, regarding *Buffet*, indicating that PFT’s formal experimentation became muted and policed.<sup>285</sup> *Buffet* was radio dramatist Rhys Adrian’s last PFT; Leigh and Blair’s improvisational approach had supplanted Adrian’s rarefied comedy and Gilbert’s confrontational drama.

Vanguard viewers perceived Osborne’s *The Right Prospectus* as ‘an amusing experiment’, Potter’s *Angels* as ‘intriguing, out-of-the-ordinary’ and, Welland’s *THH* as ‘unusual, but plausible’, a telling combination.<sup>286</sup> Furthermore, Adrian’s *The Foxtrot* was ‘clever, unusual and off beat’ and *Orkney* ‘refreshingly different from the usual run’ of TV drama. The otherwise naturalistic *THH* was criticised for its inconclusive ending and being occasionally hard-to-follow – presumably during Alan Clarke’s bravura modernist opening sequence, which presents via voice-over the internal thoughts of varied parishioners during a Methodist service. Clarke juxtaposes this evocation of psychological realism with cutaways to a raucous pub. For ‘well-made’ PFT advocates, series 1’s biggest offenders were Douglas Livingstone’s *ICSMLW* and *Everybody Say Cheese*, both also directed by Clarke. Most viewers found the former incomprehensible: ‘too muddled and disjointed’, a ‘bewildering presentation’, giving ‘little idea what the play was about’, one pithily called it ‘meaningless tripe’; while, to many, the latter’s ‘gimmicky’ use of flashbacks and

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<sup>283</sup> VR/71/205; VR/71/215.

<sup>284</sup> VR/71/25.

<sup>285</sup> VR/76/638.

<sup>286</sup> VR/70/527; VR/70/553; VR/70/627.

photographs ‘was extremely disjointed and confusing’, accompanying an ordinary, poor plot.<sup>287</sup> In contrast, such viewers preferred *The Lie* – ‘understandable’, ‘with a story’ – Edelman’s ‘straightforward and understandable’ *ADT*, alongside *Robin Redbreast* (‘wonderful plot’), *Hell’s Angel* (‘solid style of writing’) and PFT’s realist apex, *WTBB* (‘a very compelling plot’).<sup>288</sup>

In series 7, viewers identified Charles Wood’s *DAIS*, an individualistic, acerbic satire of Bristol suburban middle-class reactions to rape, as the principal offender against comprehensibility: it was ‘difficult to follow’, with dialogue ‘almost incomprehensible at times’, went in ‘many directions which led nowhere’ and left many wondering ‘what on earth had been the point of it all’.<sup>289</sup> Typically for many PFT sceptics in 1977, its ending was ‘totally confusing’.<sup>290</sup> In contrast, three months earlier, viewers commended Bernard Kops ‘on the excellence of his script’ for *RMID*, which, ‘many joyfully noted, had a beginning, middle and end’.<sup>291</sup> Colin Welland’s *Your Man* was praised for its ‘very clear and readily understood message’ about the disturbing effects of the Troubles on a young boy.<sup>292</sup> Brian Clark’s *TCP* appealed due to its ‘strong, easy-to-follow storyline’.<sup>293</sup> Contrastingly, for varying sizeable minorities, *TEG*, *Housewives’ Choice*, *Buffet*, *LOAG*, *TKOD* and *DAIS* lacked plot, structure or point.<sup>294</sup> Viewers of *TEG*, *Buffet* and *LOAG* seemingly took against their combination of unfamiliar characters and idiosyncratic narrative styles. Surprisingly, showing the persistence of this bugbear, ‘a small group’ claimed there was ‘not much of a plot’ in *BMB*, Jack Rosenthal’s highly well-made comedy-drama!<sup>295</sup>

Beyond the sample, my identified subset of 33 modernist or non-naturalistic PFTs were, unsurprisingly, less well-received than PFTs that adhered to realism. These modernist PFTs gained an average audience of 5.35 million and an RI of 47, whereas a similar number of realist PFTs were watched by 6.82 million with an RI of 68, showing a statistically significant preference among viewers for watching realistic PFTs.<sup>296</sup> Only six of the 33

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<sup>287</sup> VR/70/580; VR/71/215. There was no ARR for Clive Exton’s *The Rainbirds*, which would unquestionably have competed with *ICSMLW* in the audience bafflement stakes.

<sup>288</sup> VR/70/541; VR/70/591; VR/70/615; VR/71/36; VR/71/162.

<sup>289</sup> VR/77/52.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> VR/76/555.

<sup>292</sup> VR/76/622.

<sup>293</sup> VR/77/240.

<sup>294</sup> VR/76/586; VR/76/601; VR/76/638; VR/77/8; VR/77/23; VR/77/52.

<sup>295</sup> VR/76/518.

<sup>296</sup> Reception in early 1978 illustrates viewers’ tendency to prefer PFTs like *The Spongers*, which fit into Alasdair Milne’s definition of ‘social’ plays, over the overtly ‘political’ *Licking Hitler* and *Destiny* (see Chapter 2).

modernist PFTs exceeded PFT's mean average RI; audiences did not appreciate the critically-lauded and canonised *Penda's Fen* and *BRH*, which received RIs of 39 and 54 on their first screenings. Rudkin's PFT was clearly *too* open and transgressive a text for many viewers, in contrast with Robert Holman's *Chance of a Lifetime* (1980), also an open text, but one which steered viewers towards angry and stoical responses (see Chapter 2).

However, among these, PFT's detours into culturally familiar genres like horror, thriller or science fiction were popular: *Robin Redbreast* (RI 64), *Vampires* (62), *The Flipside of Dominick Hide* (1980; 75) (*Flipside*) and *RDW* (66). For many viewers, *Flipside* provided 'a welcome relief' from PFT's usual 'mundane and depressing' themes.<sup>297</sup> Nearly as acclaimed were *Carson Country* (68) and *The Cheviot* (70), which were strongly appreciated by smaller audiences of 2.78 and 4.19 million, respectively, which may reflect their non-Englishness. While most viewers found them highly illuminating, there were isolated complaints about the former's Northern Irish accents being incomprehensible.<sup>298</sup>

For most viewers, visionary PFTs that engaged with fantasy, history and myth, like *Penda's Fen* and Alan Garner's *Red Shift* (1978), were 'defeatingly difficult' or 'too complicated'.<sup>299</sup> Rudkin's PFT came in for criticism for 'eschewing familiar patterns' and seeming 'random' and illogical to 'many' confused viewers who had 'no idea what standards to apply' to it.<sup>300</sup> This censure inadvertently highlights its pantheistic appeal for vanguard viewers who watched open-mindedly and without fixed expectations. Notably, *Red Shift* was appreciated more by viewers who knew Garner's novel, and those under 30, who may have especially admired the PFT's vivid, intense contemporary sequences of a difficult teenage relationship.<sup>301</sup>

PFTs which used language that was esoterically scientific – *Doran's Box* (RI 29) – or Belfast-specific – *The Last Window Cleaner* (33) – or aimed to convey internal thoughts and feelings like *The Bankrupt* (1972; 39) and *Steps Back* (1973; no RI) only impressed a handful among their small audiences.<sup>302</sup> Viewers displayed deep conformity in criticising Dennis Potter's *Schmoedipus* (38) and *Double Dare* (45) for being too 'different', with a vocal minority criticising their permissiveness.<sup>303</sup> The latter was slightly better received:

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<sup>297</sup> VR/80/505.

<sup>298</sup> VR/72/626.

<sup>299</sup> VR/74/194; VR/78/33.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> *Doran's Box* obtained the lowest official RI of any PFT, though is equalled by my unofficial calculation for *ICSMLW*.

<sup>303</sup> VR/74/375; VR/76/186.

one baffled spectator nevertheless found it ‘compulsive viewing’.<sup>304</sup> However, like the bewildering *The Bankrupt*, ‘the ‘weird’ *Doran’s Box* and *Desert*, which for two-fifths of viewers had ‘little decipherable meaning’, *Double Dare* was generally denounced for lacking a clear meaning.<sup>305</sup>

In contrast to this range of non-naturalist PFTs that left most viewers ‘lost’ or ‘bewildered’, John McGrath’s Brechtian *The Cheviot* was better received as its cast communicated its politically partial message clearly and passionately.<sup>306</sup> The decline in PFT modernism is shown by how McGrath’s final PFT the two-part *The Adventures of Frank* (1980) gained low RIs of 30 and 51. Viewers resisted its irreverent songs, innovative video effects and freewheeling visual style, its excessive length and an unevenness in the cast’s performances compared with *The Cheviot*. Actor Jane Wood sees Mick Ford as miscast as the titular Frank: playing the part too archly, failing to convey the requisite warmth and sincerity that viewers would identify with, feeling he channels McGrath’s Brechtian distancing *too* well.<sup>307</sup> However, the divergent RIs show how McGrath’s incisive, prophetic political analysis of the new Thatcherite financial economy emerged more in *Part Two: Seeds of Ice*.

Some viewers advancing pro-comprehensibility discourses found actors’ vocal clarity important, tallying with Billy Smart’s findings about 1970s TV drama theatre-adaptations.<sup>308</sup> While viewers appreciated Angela Down’s performance as ‘rape victim’ Daphne in *DAIS*, Down’s ‘voice was occasionally said to be rather colourless’, implying audience desire for more ostentatious character acting.<sup>309</sup> Certain PFT viewers implicitly expected to hear clear, intelligible received-pronunciation accents, perceiving regional accents and dialects as unwelcome intruders in their homes. Weeks earlier, many viewers of Kay Adshead’s performance as the working-class Linda in *TKOD* were ‘irritated by her thick accent and continual gum-chewing’.<sup>310</sup> To these people, Linda’s Lancastrian accent is unacceptable; they associate it with her perceived slovenly consumerist habit of gum-chewing: judging Mike Leigh’s devised character in sociolinguistic terms, rather than as amusingly enacting banal everydayness.

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>305</sup> VR/76/36; VR/72/698; TV/84/52.

<sup>306</sup> VR/74/347.

<sup>307</sup> Wood, J. (2021) Interview with author, 4 Mar. Wood, Jim Broadbent and Alan Ford’s performances are broad, but feel surer in conveying their smaller roles, which are social types.

<sup>308</sup> Smart, B. (2014a) op. cit.

<sup>309</sup> VR/77/52.

<sup>310</sup> VR/77/23.

Precisely echoing metropolitan TV critics, a ‘good many’ viewers ‘couldn’t understand’ the Scottish accents in Peter McDougall’s *TEG*, while ‘a small number had some difficulty in understanding the Irish accents’ in Welland’s *Your Man* and ‘a few’ found the Belfast accents in Graham Reid’s *ACTTFB* ‘so thick that it was sometimes hard to understand what they were saying’.<sup>311</sup> Nevertheless, via these plays’ tones of serious realism, viewers found Welland’s and Reid’s characters’ voices more palatable than those in McDougall’s and Leigh’s offbeat slices-of-life.

Viewers of *WTBB* perceived writer Tony Parker’s fair and balanced representation of state and citizen. However, they betrayed their social partiality in praising Edinburgh-born Hannah Gordon – who performed Celia in the next week’s *Orkney* – for her ‘clear diction’ as the NSPCC social worker Margaret Ashdown.<sup>312</sup> Her ‘well-modulated’ RP voice was ‘much-remarked, and enjoyed too, as relief from the ‘rough language’’ of the southern working-class ‘Gosse menage’.<sup>313</sup> Clearly, some less open-minded viewers struggled with PFT’s tangible ‘nations and regions’ turn from 1972-84 (see Chapter 4), but we should not overstate their significance.

Following Billy Smart’s perception that viewers would praise plays for what they were *not*, most admired *BMB* and *TCP* for being well-structured and entertaining, while fulfilling expectations of PFT’s realism. These exemplified mid-era PFT’s popular strain of comedy-dramas which used a *heightened* mode of social realism: occupying a mainstream ‘middle-ground’, distinguishable from committed Loachian social realism *and* experimental or modernist work. These five PFTs by Parker, Rosenthal, Welland, Clark and Reid *all* exceeded the strand’s mean average audience *and* RI figures.<sup>314</sup>

### 3.9.5. ‘Such “gloomy entertainment” in such depressing times’: escapism and edification?’<sup>315</sup>

Contrary to media-fostered myth, viewers seldom saw PFT as depressing. In PFT ARRs consulted, this pejorative adjective and its relatives ‘gloomy’, ‘grim’, ‘dispiriting’ ‘dreary’, and ‘morbid’ figure less frequently even than moralistic discourses, being used concerning 41.2% of series 1, in comparison to 23.5% of series 7 and a third of series 15. ‘Small group[s]’ or a ‘few’ found series 1’s *The Lie*, *ICSMLW* and *THH* tonally or thematically ‘depressing’.<sup>316</sup> More disliked *TLDPP*’s intentionally ‘depressing’ atmosphere and

<sup>311</sup> VR/76/586; VR/76/622; TV/84/34.

<sup>312</sup> VR/71/162.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> VR/76/622; TV/84/34. Their audiences range from 6 to 8.6 million, while their RIs span 68-86.

<sup>315</sup> TV/84/34.

<sup>316</sup> VR/70/541; VR/70/580; VR/70/627.

narrative and found *Circle Line* ‘well-written and believable but depressing in its picture of boredom and futility’.<sup>317</sup>

While ‘some’ in the audience felt *Orkney* ‘altogether too morbid and depressing to make good entertainment’, this was minimal amid wider acclaim for this filmed drama.<sup>318</sup> A ‘tiny number’ of panellists objected to Jim Allen’s *A Choice of Evils*, a historical drama showing the Pope’s culpability for Nazi war crimes against Jews and Communists, due to the ‘grimness’ of its theme, ‘preferring something in a lighter vein’.<sup>319</sup> Among PFT’s viewers, this was a *minority* predilection for escapist entertainment. Contrarily to some critics, Allen’s play was widely appreciated for its realism and thought-provoking complexity, gaining a high RI of 67. The more improvisational realism of *BYL* was only grudgingly praised, suggesting the average viewer ‘tended to be bored with a [...] depressing drama’.<sup>320</sup> This echoed critic Peter Buckman’s complaints of a lack of warmth and clear authorship.<sup>321</sup>

For many, the optimum balance was achieved in *WTBB* and *ACTTFB*, PFTs which spanned 1971-84. ‘Only a very few’ viewers expressed dislike for Tony Parker’s play about domestic violence, ‘it being their contention either that such “depressing” material was not entertainment’.<sup>322</sup> Similarly, only a ‘handful’ of the 330 respondents surveyed about Graham Reid’s Belfast drama ‘objected to the superfluity of such “gloomy entertainment” in such depressing times’.<sup>323</sup> Like critics, most viewers appreciated its balance of tones, being ‘very moving’, yet also ‘very amusing.’ This notably echoed discourses about Kops and McDougall’s bittersweet series 7 plays and Parker’s *WTBB*, which was ‘grim’, but ‘not altogether dispiriting’, its honest realism leavened by Parker’s humanistic ‘touches of pathos and humour’ and his even-handedness.<sup>324</sup>

For viewers, some PFTs roundly failed when judged according to their entertainment value: only 32% found *ICSMLW* entertaining; a representative comment of the 68% was that Livingstone’s jocular handling of adultery and lust ‘did not make for pleasant entertainment’.<sup>325</sup> Similarly, *TLDPP* – whose specific ‘entertainment’ RI was also 32 – and *The Right Prospectus* (42) were found wanting.<sup>326</sup> Series 1’s *Alma Mater* (75) was more

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<sup>317</sup> VR/70/514; VR/71/25.

<sup>318</sup> VR/71/177.

<sup>319</sup> VR/77/226.

<sup>320</sup> VR/76/532.

<sup>321</sup> Buckman (1976) op. cit.

<sup>322</sup> VR/71/162.

<sup>323</sup> TV/84/34.

<sup>324</sup> VR/71/162.

<sup>325</sup> VR/70/580.

<sup>326</sup> VR/70/514; VR/70/527.

positively received – ‘so funny in parts’ – and *The Lie* (71) and *ADT* (83) were acclaimed for their ‘entertainment value’.<sup>327</sup> PFTs appreciated on realist grounds like *HAF* (69) and *THH* (73) were also found ‘passably entertaining’ and ‘entertaining with a sort of odd humour’.<sup>328</sup> *WTBB*, despite its bleak subject matter, recorded the highest entertainment score of series 1: 89.<sup>329</sup>

Some viewers claimed that *Steps Back* was not a ‘true’ picture of the North in representing it as ‘depressing’, and asked, ‘When can we have an entertaining, happy play?’<sup>330</sup> Such expectations were occasionally fulfilled by more non-naturalistic PFTs: *The Cheviot* with its ‘infectious enthusiasm’, or the science fiction *Flipside*’s ‘sheer entertainment’.<sup>331</sup> Analogous to the melodrama *ADT*, the thriller *Robin Redbreast* provided ‘exciting [...] excellent entertainment’, with ‘a marvellously sinister atmosphere’ and over 50% ‘thoroughly enjoyed having their spines chilled’.<sup>332</sup>

The most frequently enjoyed PFTs were comedy-dramas in a heightened social realist mode, especially in series 7. The ‘genuinely funny’ series opener *BMB* was admired for its ‘warmth and humour’ and seen as ‘one of the most entertaining’ TV plays for a long time.<sup>333</sup> A section of the even larger audience for *OFAB* found it ‘an amusing and touching comedy’, while the similarly popular *TCP* was acclaimed for its ‘clever mix of poignancy and humour’.<sup>334</sup> In series 15, the social realist *ACTTFB* was received as similarly skilful in balancing tones.<sup>335</sup>

A more socially-critical ‘small minority’ with a mordant sense of humour found Leigh’s *TKOD* ‘quite *amusing in its realism*’ [my emphasis] and Bradbury’s *LOAG* ‘often very amusing in a wry way’.<sup>336</sup> A 25% audience segment – equating to 1.74 million – found the widely maligned *Angels* ‘funny and thoughtful’, likely due to Christine Hargreaves’s intelligent and effervescent performance of Dennis Potter’s character Cynthia.<sup>337</sup> *Buffet*, a rarefied comedy of middle-class anxiety about inflation and British economic decline was less favoured. Unlike critic Nancy Banks-Smith’s effusive enjoyment, only ‘a small minority’ were ‘at least moderately entertained’, leading to its abysmal RI of 32. A

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<sup>327</sup> VR/71/11; VR/70/541; VR/70/591.

<sup>328</sup> VR/70/604; VR/70/627.

<sup>329</sup> VR/71/162.

<sup>330</sup> VR/73/302.

<sup>331</sup> VR/74/347; VR/80/505.

<sup>332</sup> VR/70/615.

<sup>333</sup> VR/76/518.

<sup>334</sup> VR/77/36; VR/77/240.

<sup>335</sup> TV/84/34.

<sup>336</sup> VR/77/23; VR/77/8

<sup>337</sup> VR/70/553.

projected 1.68 million of its 5.25 million viewers found it ‘rather funny’: far fewer than were amused by Rosenthal and Clark’s comedy-dramas or, indeed, thematically comparable contemporaneous sitcoms like *Fawlty Towers* (1975-79) and *The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin* (1976-79).<sup>338</sup>

PfTs generally admired for their realism could be anathema to a small section of the audience. The proximity of *TRAF* to real industrial strife disturbed many [who] were clearly out of sympathy. They were ‘fed up’ with strikes, they said – it was bad enough to read about them constantly in the press and to see them featured in newsreels without having a play about them offered as entertainment.<sup>339</sup>

Viewers out of sympathy with Allen and Loach’s socialist ideology thought it was not ‘particularly good [...] since it only considered one side of the question – that of the workers’.<sup>340</sup> Allen himself regarded it as too didactic in comparison to his earlier TWP *The Lump* (1967) and John Hill reveals it caused discontent at the highest levels – being discussed in BBC Board of Governors, News and Current Affairs and Board of Management meetings.<sup>341</sup> However, mirroring its critical acclaim, 60% of an attentive audience *did* find Allen and Loach’s committed realism entertaining and gripping, so such aversion was rare. Notably, the play had a smaller audience of 3.48 million – less than half that of the previous three PfTs *The Foxtrot*, *WTBB* and *Orkney* – which suggests many deliberately avoided it or switched off due to its political theme. This tentatively suggests the existence of a ‘silent majority’ of British TV viewers who empathised with the reservations of the escapist viewing panellists. However, two-thirds of viewers admired *TRAF*, which approximates to 2.23 million people.

Series 7’s *Your Man* did not appeal to a third of the sample who ‘were sick of hearing about Northern Ireland’ on the news, let alone having to watch plays about it.<sup>342</sup> They felt that, ‘however valid and true [...] it was not entertainment’, which they felt should be ‘a prerequisite’ of any drama.<sup>343</sup> These 2.1 million viewers clearly expected PfT to be an escapist antidote to the news it followed. However, the other 4.71 million viewers appreciated PfT as a discursive extension of, or *corrective to*, the news in John McGrath’s terms. Later, ‘a handful’ objected to the Belfast-set *ACTTFB* on escapist grounds, but

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<sup>338</sup> VR/76/638.

<sup>339</sup> VR/71/190.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

<sup>341</sup> Madden, P. (1981) Jim Allen, in: G.W. Brandt (ed.) *British Television Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 47; Hill, J. (2011) *Ken Loach: The Politics of Film and Television*. London: British Film Institute, 97, 102.

<sup>342</sup> VR/76/622.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

around 5 million of the 6 million viewers found this human-centric familial and community drama ‘enjoyable’ or ‘extremely enjoyable’.<sup>344</sup> Younger viewers were the least likely to be bored: for them, PFTs like *Graham Reid’s*, at least, retained their appeal until the strand’s end.

One viewer’s entertainment could induce ennui in another, as evinced by responses to *Angels*, *Circle Line*, *The Foxtrot* and *Housewives’ Choice*. Many found *Angels* with its ‘sex-starved wife and an unbalanced male [...] Not exactly good entertainment’ or professed to be ‘bored’ by *Circle Line*, but it needs stressing that 50 and 49% of these plays’ viewers *did* feel entertained.<sup>345</sup> These PFT viewers were attracted by more representationally challenging or transgressive material. Philip Martin’s *Gangsters*, both gritty and stylised, appealed widely, receiving an outstanding RI of 73 from its 7.32 million audience, for whom it was ‘Gripping stuff’, ‘good, adult entertainment – worthy of an award’ and a ‘Fantastic production. When’s the next one by this team? When’s the repeat? MORE PLEASE’.<sup>346</sup> Viewers loved its populist verve, encapsulated by its climactic, ‘breathhtakingly exciting’ car chase: in stark contrast to aforementioned critical disdain, which included Chris Dunkley’s elitist, anti-Hollywood realist discourse against it.<sup>347</sup> Viewers also notably regarded *Gangsters* as ‘more like a documentary on the “seedy” side of city life’, singling Elizabeth Cassidy out for especial praise among a ‘horrifyingly believable’ cast as ‘the junkie craving a fix’.<sup>348</sup> Martin’s PFT comprehensively fulfilled the audience’s dual desires for vicarious pleasures and real-world insights.

### 3.9.6. Expectations of the ‘magnificently and intensely real’<sup>349</sup> in PFT

According to the RSGC survey and BBC ARRs, PFT’s viewers expected the strand to provide “‘realistic” plays on modern subjects’.<sup>350</sup> As discerned, a minority regularly used a *comprehensibility* discourse when criticising specific PFTs for not providing straightforward, naturalistic, ‘well-made’ narratives; especially more outré works by Osborne, Potter, Livingstone, Adrian (twice!), McDougall and Brenton.<sup>351</sup> In all 38 ARRs examined from the sample, a realism discourse is used *at least once*. Praise or censure of PFTs for their realism, or lack of realism, occurs an average of 4.4 times per Report, showing the predominance of a realism discourse over the nevertheless significant

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<sup>344</sup> TV/84/34.

<sup>345</sup> VR/70/553; VR/71/25.

<sup>346</sup> VR/75/31.

<sup>347</sup> Dunkley, C. (1975a) So what’s new? *Financial Times*, 15 Jan, 3.

<sup>348</sup> VR/75/31.

<sup>349</sup> VR/71/190.

<sup>350</sup> VR/75/503.

<sup>351</sup> VR/70/527; VR/70/553; VR/70/580, VR/71/151; VR/76/638; VR/76/586; TV/84/52.

entertainment and intelligibility discourses. Series 1 ARRs contain 4.6 uses of a realism-related discourse per Report, compared with 4.4 in series 7 and 3.7 in series 15. The proportionate focus on realism was slightly higher in series 7, given that the average word count of its qualitative ARRs declined to 307 words, from 487 in series 1; though series 15's fewer Reports averaged 721 words.<sup>352</sup>

Across series' 1, 7 and 15, the dominant positive realism discourse praised PFT's authenticity, its conviction and credibility, including the plausibility of its dialogue, situations and characters. There were 1.6 such articulations per Report in both series 1 and series 7, increasing to 3.7 for series 15, when *all* realism discourses revolved around believability. For many viewers, PFT mirrored contemporary life; among PFT's varied middle and working-class milieus, they could recognise people like themselves or enjoyed seeing more unfamiliar characters provided they were convincing or vicariously exciting, as in *Gangsters* and *BMB*. Reflecting PFT's tangible shift towards historical settings in 1977-84, the likes of *LOAG*, *SSS* and *A Choice of Evils* were widely acclaimed for capturing their period atmospheres and attendant social attitudes.<sup>353</sup> Earlier, realism in the multi-temporal *Orkney* was only briefly commended, with a minority disputing it.<sup>354</sup>

Series' 1 and 7 each had two PFTs admired in identical terms for being 'near-documentary': *WTBB*, *TRAF*, *BYL* and *TKOD*.<sup>355</sup> Contrasting to writer Tony Parker's scrupulously even-handed approach, these latter trio's creators were more partial concerning their characters. Loach and Allen's documentary approach was more popular *proportionately* than Leigh's send-up of the seriousness of documentaries like *The Family* (1974), which only vanguard viewers appreciated. *WTBB* was valued for 'inviting an objective appraisal of events as they happened'.<sup>356</sup> This shows an audience segment articulating Brechtian theory, but seeing Parker as more akin to an impartial referee than an active participant.

*TKOD*'s realism was perceived by many in its large audience as unattractive and 'boring'.<sup>357</sup> This echoed the pointed earlier reception of *The Lie*, about an affluent middle-class family, as 'like watching a documentary of a rather dull family and their everyday life' which, for one viewer, 'seemed a trifle unreal, as though the characters did not belong

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<sup>352</sup> While there are no ARRs for the more non-naturalistic series 15 PFTs *ZFZ* and *RDW*, these scored higher than average AIs, which thus indicates an increased audience openness to experimentation.

<sup>353</sup> VR/77/8; VR/77/150; VR/77/226.

<sup>354</sup> VR/71/177. For a few, 'The Whaler's Return', set in 1871, was seen as lacking credibility – bizarrely, one viewer thus assumes first-hand knowledge of the texture of life on Orkney a hundred years previously!

<sup>355</sup> VR/71/162; VR/71/190; VR/76/532; VR/77/23.

<sup>356</sup> VR/71/162.

<sup>357</sup> VR/77/23.

to our world'.<sup>358</sup> Another viewer reacted snobbishly to Leigh's PFT, which depicts a northern working-class milieu: 'I suppose these type of people do exist but do we have to have them in our homes?'<sup>359</sup> Such barbed, idiosyncratic reception mirrors the aforementioned critical antipathy to *TEG* and *TKOD*. Some viewers hoped that PFT's representations of death, public-school life or student transgressions were *not true*, being palpably disturbed by *HAF*, *Alma Mater* and *Circle Line*.<sup>360</sup> The former was 'too down-to-earth' for a minority, while, in a back-handed reproach, the latter was referred to as 'frank, but not appealing.'<sup>361</sup> However, the half who liked *Circle Line* found the writer Gilbert's treatment of the 'student/older generation situation [...] enlightening [showing] remarkable understanding'.<sup>362</sup> Nevertheless, Gilbert denies any intention of making *Circle Line* social realism like, say, Leigh and Garnett's *Hard Labour* (1973), instead seeing his writing of the play as a discrete, imaginative process of discovery.

Negative discourses describing PFT as 'implausible', 'incredible', 'exaggerated', 'unconvincing' or 'unbelievable' feature nine times in series 1 ARR's and eight times in series 7 Reports, but these were heavily outscored by aforementioned positive realism discourses. Thriller *A Photograph* was seen as 'contrived' or 'altogether too absurd' and as outmoded compared with Bowen's previous *Robin Redbreast*.<sup>363</sup> The extreme class conflict depicted in *Housewives' Choice* and *Gotcha* was felt to be 'far-fetched and disturbing'.<sup>364</sup> Viewers criticised the 'improbability' of Roy Kendall's plotting in the former: incidents 'seemed divorced from what might happen in reality'.<sup>365</sup> The scene where homeless Eric (Bernard Hill) invades the home of middle-class feminist Marcia (Frances de la Tour) and destroys what viewers call 'a beautiful house' – a set designed by Susan Spence – received sharp criticism: 'people don't act that way in real life'.<sup>366</sup> Such criticisms are justified, as Kendall insufficiently develops Eric's character to build towards this scene. However, vanguard viewers may have appreciated the enlarged drama of Eric and Marcia's confrontation for starkly dramatising latent conflicts between men and women and haves and have-nots.

Contrastingly, writer Peter Nichols had been widely praised by viewers of *HAF* for his observation and recording of how people actually speak and act. Some saw Nichols's

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<sup>358</sup> VR/70/541.

<sup>359</sup> VR/77/23.

<sup>360</sup> VR/70/604; VR/71/11; VR/71/25.

<sup>361</sup> VR/70/604; VR/71/25.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid. Gilbert, W.S. (2021) Emails to author, 7 Mar, 31 Mar.

<sup>363</sup> VR/77/164.

<sup>364</sup> VR/76/601; VR/77/209.

<sup>365</sup> VR/76/601.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

fellow series 1 writers Colin Welland, Hugo Charteris, Tony Parker and Rhys Adrian as sharing his sensitivity to everyday nuances; the latter displayed insight into lower-middle class people in *The Foxtrot*.<sup>367</sup> Adrian's divisive play was perceived as 'a lovely comedy; makes one realise how we look to others; no doubt a few could recognise themselves in the characters'.<sup>368</sup> These audience discourses strongly echo Bernard Davies and Philip Purser's critical advocacy of PFT's observational, journalistic realism.

A viewer called *TRAF* 'magnificently and intensely real, and I should know, having lived in Lancashire for twenty years and witnessed some bitter disputes'.<sup>369</sup> Notably, some viewers *countered* claims that Bowen's weird thriller *Robin Redbreast* was 'far-fetched', one speculating whether 'this could really happen', with another 'confirming' that, 'after living in a small village in the South-West we can well believe this play'.<sup>370</sup> The scale of PFT's association with diverse realisms is demonstrated in a viewer's critique of Tom Bell's angel Michael Biddle in Potter's modernist drama *Angels* for looking 'most un-angel-like'.<sup>371</sup>

Some discourses are notable by their relative absence. In series 1 ARR, viewers only express feelings of being *involved with* or *identifying with* the characters they find *relatable* three times; this occurs twice in series 7, once regarding the situation of educational debates in *Campion's Interview* and once in series 15, when viewers saw characters in Graham Reid's 'involving' *ACTTFB* as 'easy to relate to'.<sup>372</sup> The series 7 PFT which elicited most intense recognition in audiences was Mike Stott's comedy *OFAB*, which was widely appreciated for its 'recognisably ordinary situation' and 'convincing and very likeable' protagonists, the Blincoes (Alison Steadman and Bernard Hill).<sup>373</sup> One viewer mentioned having experienced two natural births, another adding: 'We recognised many events we are able to laugh at now though not at the time'.<sup>374</sup> Conversely, in 1971-77 viewers expressed feelings that *Alma Mater*, *Everybody Say Cheese*, *RMID* and *DAIS* lacked relatable characters; these are all at least fairly androcentric PFTs, though the latter, shown the week after *OFAB*, is exceptionally misogynistic.<sup>375</sup> In contrast to Stott's fond humour and empathy with the underdog working-class couple, Charles Wood's nihilistic satire of middle-class grotesques *DAIS* was found 'completely unrealistic', with 'not one

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<sup>367</sup> VR/70/604; VR/70/627; VR/71/36; VR/71/162; VR/71/151.

<sup>368</sup> VR/71/151.

<sup>369</sup> VR/71/190.

<sup>370</sup> VR/70/615.

<sup>371</sup> VR/70/553.

<sup>372</sup> VR/70/591; VR/71/162; VR/71/177; VR/77/209; TV/84/34.

<sup>373</sup> VR/77/36.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>375</sup> VR/71/11; VR/76/555; VR/75/503.

reasonable, believable character'.<sup>376</sup> This echoes the ARD report's aforementioned findings concerning women viewers' responses in 1975.

Viewers found pleasurable recognition in dramas which reminded them of their own past experiences: for example, the 1956-set sequences in Bradbury's *LOAG*, aided by perfect costuming and 'the skilful insertion of contemporary newsreel'.<sup>377</sup> However, some who were old enough to have experienced the Second World War echoed critic Purser's partial responses in feeling cool towards *ADT* due to 'Dislike of anything reviving unhappy memories' and *The Imitation Game* (1980), as 'it didn't seem true to ATS Royal Signals life as I knew it; the characters were unbelievable, no-one acted like that'.<sup>378</sup> *LOAG* reinforces its nostalgia by its temporal intercutting between contrasting 1956 and 1976 scenes. For some, this enabled a potent and critical dissection of the present: 'the modern sequences seemed to epitomise not only the time but also the whole ambiance of the 70s'.<sup>379</sup> This reception suggests viewers shared the play's contemporary perspective of compromised middle-age and the 'depressing' image the 1970s later accrued via journalists like Christopher Booker, alongside Dennis Potter's nostalgia for youthful idealism in the 1950s.<sup>380</sup> Such comfortably-off, nostalgic older viewers and critics foreclosed more radical or, indeed, optimistic perceptions of 1970s Britain. In contrast with this pessimism, comedy-dramas like *Early Struggles* (1976), *BMB*, *TCP* and, especially, *OFAB* did express *more* satisfaction with their present moment, while working through identifiable social problems and situations via a heightened realism. It is, however, possible to aberrantly decode *LOAG* and perceive the story from the position of Fay (Josephine Welcome), Leslie Potter's (Stephen Moore) mistress, a diligent social worker who displays insightful wit, to counter Leslie's perennial moaning.

PfT viewers gravitated from praising ensemble acting to focusing on individual performances. In series 1 ARRs, there is acclaim for rich character acting by duos Sheila Keith and Freda Bamford in *HAF* and Neil McCarthy and Cheryl Kennedy in *WTBB*, but far fewer actors are named in series 7 Reports.<sup>381</sup> One who is, the TV star Peter Barkworth, was 'enormously popular' with viewers of *TCP*, who considered him 'thoroughly convincing' as Richard Elkinson.<sup>382</sup> Furthermore, in series 15, Kenneth Branagh, James Ellis and Elaine Lordan's performances were singled out for praise, in contrast to

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<sup>376</sup> VR/77/52.

<sup>377</sup> VR/77/8.

<sup>378</sup> VR/70/591; VR/80/199.

<sup>379</sup> VR/77/8.

<sup>380</sup> Potter, D. (1977a) op. cit.

<sup>381</sup> VR/70/604; VR/71/162.

<sup>382</sup> VR/77/240.

‘unbelievable’ performances by others in *Desert* and *TAMSE*.<sup>383</sup> Oddly, Bríd Brennan and Gwen Taylor’s crucial acting in *ACTTFB* goes unmentioned, whereas Taylor’s earlier performance in Alan Plater’s *Land of Green Ginger* (1973) had received ‘special praise’.<sup>384</sup> Notably, Barkworth, Branagh and Ellis had all played the same characters in previous PFTs, marking another rare but tangible PFT engagement with television seriality.

Audiences perceived the ensemble acting in *WTBB* as fruitfully ‘unexceptionable’ in its naturalism, making ‘viewers feel they were watching real people involved in an actual situation’.<sup>385</sup> Furthermore, Loach and Garnett’s casting of unknowns in *TRAF* was highly commended for establishing the play’s impression of realism: ‘several said that it was hard to believe that these were indeed actors and not really workers caught up in a strike’, which one viewer cannily put down to the use of ‘unfamiliar faces’.<sup>386</sup> For example, Brian Glover plays a rank-and-file firebrand trade unionist; in 1971, Glover would not have been a household name, given that Loach and Hines’s feature-film *Kes* (1969) had yet to be shown on TV and Glover was yet to appear as Art in Peter Terson’s Art, Abe and Ern PFT trilogy (1972-74).<sup>387</sup> This acting naturalism discourse was reiterated concerning another working-class-centric play, *TEG*, where several admired how Jon Morrison and Billy Connolly ‘hardly seemed to be acting at all, so natural did they appear’.<sup>388</sup>

The unpopular *Desert* was attacked for being ‘far-fetched and silly’, emphasising how the VS modernist style had, by 1984, fallen from favour.<sup>389</sup> *Desert* had its vanguard advocates, like the few who saw the impressionistic, all-filmed *Steps Back* as ‘refreshingly different’.<sup>390</sup> More popular filmed departures from realism *Vampires* and *Flipside* were, paradoxically, enjoyed by audiences for still being grounded in realism: acting and location filming established the former’s ‘realistic’ Liverpool ‘atmosphere’; the latter’s ‘credibility’ was enhanced by ‘outdoor locations’ and restrained use of special effects.<sup>391</sup>

PFT’s best-received social realist dramas, including those by Tony Parker and Graham Reid, frequently elicited viewer responses claiming they were ‘just like watching real life’.<sup>392</sup> *Edna*, *The Inebriate Woman* (1971), *Hard Labour*, *Through the Night*, *A Story to*

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<sup>383</sup> TV/84/34; TV/84/52; TV/84/116.

<sup>384</sup> VR/73/42.

<sup>385</sup> VR/71/162.

<sup>386</sup> VR/71/190.

<sup>387</sup> Terson’s recurring characters foreshadowed PFT’s later moves towards seriality, with characters returning: the Elkinsons in 1977, Dominick Hide in 1982 and the Martins in 1983 and 1984.

<sup>388</sup> VR/76/586.

<sup>389</sup> TV/84/52.

<sup>390</sup> VR/73/302.

<sup>391</sup> VR/79/23; VR/80/505.

<sup>392</sup> VR/78/52.

*Frighten the Children* (1976) (*A Story*), *The Spongers* (1978), *Billy* (1979) and *Minor Complications* (1980) all gained exceptional PFT RIs of 69-80 and many obtained over 8 million viewers. In RAID style, these 1971-80 PFTs dramatise unpaid domestic labour, failures of communication and clinical negligence in the NHS, rape and murder, housing, welfare and domestic violence; alongside local government, Social Services and wider society's insufficient care. A large majority of viewers single out performances in these by Liz Smith, Alison Steadman, Christine Hargreaves, Peter Kerrigan, Gertie Almond, and the child actors Paula McDonagh, Jason Plenderleith and Leigh Medcraft, for playing roles that illuminated controversial and disturbing issues.<sup>393</sup> Viewers of *Hard Labour* thought it 'painful to watch [...] once-seen-never-to-be-forgotten' or 'unbearably depressing', but most appreciated its necessity and authenticity.<sup>394</sup> While viewers failed to explicitly articulate the play's clear exposure of a misogynistic society – which enforces Mrs Thornley, after employment during the day, to undertake unpaid domestic drudgery in the evening – it is notable how the 'few' viewers who 'had no idea what it was supposed to be about' were likely men as oblivious in their outlook as certain male characters represented in Leigh and Garnett's PFT.

Trevor Griffiths's *Through the Night* had 'pertinent and important things to say' which chimed with many viewers' personal experiences.<sup>395</sup> The 'handful' who thought Jack Shepherd was 'rather too scruffy and informal to be believable' as a doctor were comprehensively outnumbered by those praising the production's creation of an NHS ward, 'even down to the tatty loos'.<sup>396</sup> *A Story* was praised by a mother in practical terms, which are starkly revealing of Britain in 1976: 'Extremely well done. It has had a very good effect on my youngest – she at last sees the danger of going out alone'.<sup>397</sup> Some viewers compared John Hopkins's PFT to *Z Cars* and *Softly, Softly* (1966-69) in its authenticity; most saw its 'brutal impact' as apposite.<sup>398</sup>

Somewhat understating its coruscating emotive impact, viewers praised Jim Allen's *The Spongers* for its Tony Parker-like 'balanced and sympathetic' representation of all sides of the situation, though 'many' viewers thought Allen had exposed 'the time-honoured cliché that all people on social security lead a luxurious and idle life because they don't want to work'.<sup>399</sup> G.F. Newman's *Billy* was seen as more effective than a documentary in

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<sup>393</sup> VR/73/165; VR/75/679; VR/78/52; VR/79/516.

<sup>394</sup> VR/73/165.

<sup>395</sup> VR/75/679.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid.

<sup>397</sup> VR/76/64.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> VR/78/52.

highlighting the social problem of domestic violence.<sup>400</sup> PFT's regular viewers, and indeed, much wider groups of irregulars, accepted such challenging 'social' dramas with 'inevitable' tragic endings, while also valuing the humour in Allen, Leigh and Griffiths's plays.

### **3.10. Conclusion**

If, as Dorothy Hobson argued, the soap opera *Crossroads* (1964-88) meant something different to each viewer, then clearly, the multitudinous PFT had an even less fixed identity. However, some firm and tentative conclusions can be drawn about what it meant to critics and viewers. Compared with 1970, PFT had become proportionately less central in critics' writing about TV by 1984. In 1976-77, this well-respected strand was comparably taken for granted by critics, despite series 7 being the most-watched by the public. By 1984, a cluster of neo-critics had emerged, who largely adhered to Rixon's characterisation of them in writing self-indulgently and not taking PFT as seriously as it had been in 1970-77. Critics such as Peter Ackroyd, Julian Barnes, Herbert Kretzmer and Chris Dunkley saw spring 1984's diverse likes of *ZFZ*, *MOTE* and *Desert* as laughable, building on Last and Thomas's earlier jesting constructions of the strand's gloomy image. However, even this demonstrated how critics placed PFT as central within the TV field: across all three points in its history PFT received vastly more coverage than other long-running popular drama series'.

Notably, while critics found much to admire in 1984's PFTs, there was a generally lower hit-rate than in 1970-71.<sup>401</sup> There were sporadic interventions from New Left or left-of-centre critics or academics – Williams and Hunt in the first half of the 1970s, later, Gilbert, Howes, Lane, McArthur, Baehr and Wyver, but these voices were isolated. However, during 1976-77, Peter Fiddick, Seán Day-Lewis and Shaun Usher – complemented idiosyncratically by the impressionistic Nancy Banks-Smith – formed a cohesive group of critics which extolled PFT's challenging pluralism. Outside this group, enthusiasm for PFT's topical contemporaneity dwindled over time with defenders of the 'only outlet for the single, original, contemporary play' being replaced by the neo-critics, many of whom were jobbing literary figures.<sup>402</sup> Unlike Day-Lewis, Philip Purser – and, to varying degrees, Richard Last and Kretzmer – felt that latter-day PFT was not fulfilling this function, nor

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<sup>400</sup> VR/79/516. The use of 'domestic violence' in this latter ARR shows language change, as the earlier *WTBB* ARR contains the more clinical, detached phrase 'battered baby syndrome': VR/71/162.

<sup>401</sup> Purser, P. (1971d) op. cit.

<sup>402</sup> Knight (1977a) op. cit.

proportionately delivering as much quality as in series 1; Purser also increasingly resented its radical reinterpretations of British history.

Barring these groupings, the majority of critics preferred, as McArthur argues, to evaluate PFT as realist Art, *even* in the case of the modernist experimental drama *BRH*. Discussion of Potter's canonical PFT echoed previous artisanal-journalistic discourses used about the heightened realism of Colin Welland, Julia Jones and Peter Nichols. By 1984, critics were celebrating *The Jewel in the Crown* in such connoisseur-like terms, with PFT sometimes failing when, unfairly, judged against this yardstick. In 1976-84, younger writers such as Barrie Keeffe, Peter McDougall and Howard Brenton were overly censured by nostalgic critics or, like David Pirie, comparatively *ignored* in comparison to PFT writers born in the 1930s or earlier like Clark, Jones, Nichols, Potter, Rosenthal and Welland.

PFT audiences averaged 5.63 million viewers. Different viewers liked and disliked different social milieus depicted in PFTs, whose multiplicity accommodated diverse spectators, who were not as loyal as soap opera viewers. While the data is sparse, it suggests that PFT had a marginally, or significantly, higher proportion of women viewers. In line with national averages, almost two-thirds of PFT viewers were working-class. The BBC ARD's demographic snapshots from spring 1975 imply that working-class men were much likelier to feel satisfied with the programme than middle-class women, who felt that PFT offered them insufficiently identifiable characters. Male-authored 1973-74 PFTs centring on women characters like *Hard Labour* and *Leeds United!* were exceptional in an era when male working-class identity was vividly and empathetically represented, humorously and seriously, by Peter Terson and Jim Allen. Evidence from audience research suggests *some* backing for the argument that women felt that PFT in 1970-77 furnished them with fewer recognisable characters, in contrast to well-served male viewers (see Chapter 5 for extended analysis concerning PFT and gender).

Discourse analysis reveals that PFT's viewer sub-groups included escapists, seeking entertainment who sometimes became disgruntled with PFT. This pleasure-seeking minority disliked close-to-the-bone PFTs like *TRAF* (1971), *Your Man* (1976) and *ACTTFB* (1984) for being uncomfortably similar to the news they followed in the televisual flow. In contrast, vanguard viewers desired topical social insights and appreciated formal experimentation. However, it is far too neat a distinction to perceive the escapists as working-class and the vanguard as middle-class, or apply this to gender. Conversely, a small group of PFT-monitoring moralists echoed Mary Whitehouse's National Viewers' and Listeners' Association (NVLA) by criticising PFT for bringing excessive incursions of

‘sordid’ reality into their homes, especially bad language, and more occasionally, sex, violence, drugs or natural childbirth. These viewers’ masochistic complaints only *occasionally* found echo in critics like Wiggin, Thomas and Last. While, for instance, the reception of Gilbert’s contentious *Circle Line* casts light on *real* divides in social attitudes, the moralists always tended to be outnumbered.

In 1971-80, a sequence of social realist PFTs made comparable societal interventions to forerunner *Cathy Come Home* (1966), appealing strongly and widely beyond the ‘herbivore’ vanguard: many gaining over 8 million viewers and exceptionally high RIs. These were widely admired for adopting documentarian styles, while incisively illuminating difficult and troubling topical issues through fictional enactment. Bookending PFT’s run, Tony Parker and Graham Reid’s plays exemplified even-handed and complex realism. Indeed, realism was the *dominant* discourse in audience responses to PFT. Echoing critics’ artisanal-journalistic discourses of PFT writers observing or recording life, viewers appreciated ‘true-to-life’ characters, situations and dialogue that they saw as mirroring their own lives, or as accurately conveying unfamiliar milieus. Acting and production aesthetics were invariably assessed for how they contributed atmospheric verisimilitude to particular PFTs. In its contrivance, Bernard Hill and Frances de la Tour’s climactic confrontation in *Housewives’ Choice* offended viewers in departing from realism and because Eric’s violence is enacted on an aesthetically-pleasing middle-class space.

By 1984, critics were less forgiving of deviations from realism than audiences, mocking the dystopic *ZFZ*, which audiences took seriously and appreciated. However, viewers and critics were mostly united in castigating *Desert*, which reflects an aversion to its serious, experimental treatment of historical British imperialism: an equally challenging, though less immediately ‘universal’ subject than post-nuclear war survival. Compared with earlier audience appreciation of the informative insights into Northern Irish and Scottish history provided by the similarly modernist *Carson Country* and *The Cheviot*, this suggests a narrowing in viewers’ outlooks.

Discourse analysis shows that PFT was generally more praised for its topical than historical insights, though viewers recognised how Behan and McGrath’s historical dramas starkly explained *present* news events to them. A significant section of viewers desired comprehensible and entertaining narratives, as exemplified by Jack Rosenthal and Brian Clark’s comedy-dramas and the varied forms of heightened realism offered by Peter Nichols, Julia Jones, Colin Welland and Philip Martin, alongside Parker and Reid’s unflinching realism. Echoing critics’ preference for relatability over Leigh and Blair’s

improvisatory dramas, a critical mass of viewers preferred meaningful incident and narrative closure to perceived disjointedness and ‘weird’ open-endedness.<sup>403</sup> Among non-naturalistic PFTs, audiences preferred those which reworked familiar genres – those by Martin, Bowen, Gibson and Paul or Pirie – to more iconoclastic modernist PFTs by Rudkin, McGrath and Potter, though *Penda’s Fen* and *BRH* were *significantly* more appreciated by far-sighted critics in comparison to audiences.

A vocal minority of viewers, as Billy Smart perceives concerning the same era’s TV period dramas, expected another form of comprehensibility – clear RP accents, thus implicitly desiring middle-class or upper-class social milieus. These viewers sometimes explicitly denigrated geographical outliers like Peter McDougall’s Greenock-set *TEG*; several critics, whose metropolitan bias Peter Ansorge has identified, echoed this sociolinguistic partiality. Graham Reid’s *Billy* trilogy’s mean average audience – 5.4 million – was, probably, limited in comparison to its fellow ultra-realist PFTs from *WTBB* to *Minor Complications*, due to its Belfast accents. However, the varied likes of *Orkney*, *The Happy Hunting Ground*, *Vampires* and *Degree of Uncertainty* were widely watched and enjoyed partly *due to* their geographic specificity.

My discourse analysis reveals that only a small minority of critics and viewers saw PFT as overly ‘worthy’ or ‘depressing’. However, many viewers did have an underlying desire for *warmly* presented, identifiable characters and dramatic situations balancing toughness with humour. These ‘middle-ground’ viewers shared the perspective of critics like Purser, Kretzmer and Thomas rather than wanting to inhabit the subject position of armchair analyst appreciating the strand’s societal insights or relevance associated with its proximity to the news. The abrasive and analytical tones of *DAIS* and *Desert* were perceived negatively compared with the warmer *BMB* and *TCP*. Those four PFTs all contain broad, stereotypical characterisation, but Rosenthal and Clark’s humorous, relatable characters appealed far more than did Brenton’s abstract class types and Wood’s misanthropic creations. John McGrath’s PFT trajectory demonstrates this: his earlier works *Orkney* and *The Cheviot* appealed through being communicated via piquancy and warmth, compared to 1980’s less surely realised *The Adventures of Frank*. Allen and Loach used a *lack* of recognisability to their advantage: casting unknowns instead of star names in *TRAF*. Their employment of an actor like Brian Glover added verisimilitude, and helped establish this fine actor in the public’s affection.

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<sup>403</sup> Horace Newcomb likes how protagonists in Masterpiece Theatre (1971- ) are not ‘paternalistic guides’ or ‘problem-solvers’. Like this US strand of British period dramas and literary adaptations, PFTs explored ‘complex moral and social issues’ and *benefitted from* its lack of closure: Newcomb op. cit. 262.

Overall, while PFT became somewhat less appreciated and defended by critics over time, audiences remained engaged, as series 15's high Appreciation Indices (see Appendix 1B) demonstrate, even if they far preferred PFT's realism to its modernism. It still opened conversations on difficult societal issues, even if not quite as consistently as it did in its 1972-74 experimentalist zenith or its 1975-80 heyday of heightened, documentarian realism. PFT exerted its biggest pull with viewers and critics when it told clear, entertaining and topical stories using realistic means; more regularly, it succeeded by fulfilling two or three of these precepts.

## Chapter 4

### ‘[N]ot merely the real national theatre, but a multi-national one to boot’<sup>1</sup>: Play for Today and national and regional identity

What we had in the 1960s and 1970s I once described [as] ‘the most democratic period of British drama in our entire history’. [...] Taken together, we had a complete spectrum that provided a fair reflection of what was going on in the country, especially outside the capital. Pick half a dozen names at random – Jack Rosenthal, Elaine Morgan, Alan Bleasdale, Tom Hadaway, Keith Dewhurst and Peter McDougall – bear in mind that there are 50 more where they came from, look at their collected works (if they have survived), and you will find the tale of our nation written with a depth, colour and diversity unmatched by any professional historian (Alan Plater).<sup>2</sup>

**Kilted Man** (Iain Ormsby-Knox): Scotland’s a great wee country. A great wee nation! And *don’t you forget it! Okay!?* (PFT *The Good Time Girls*, 1981).

**Marie** (Maggie Shevlin): I know where I stand. On 800 years of history. 800 years of repression, exploitation and attempted genocide. This time, we’re going to put an end to that for all time, we’re clearing up the unfinished business of this country’s history... You’re *involved* as much as any other Irishman.

**Fletcher** (Gerard Murphy): Keep your history, you belong in it... You know, they should build museums for you instead of prisons. The rest of us, we just want shot of it.

**Semple** (Sam Dale): Look, Marie, we can still be friends without having to agree about all this... We used to just discuss it over a beer (PFT *Catchpenny Twist*, 1977).

At this time, when Devolution is so much in the air, BBC-1’s Play For Today seems to be doing its best to dismember the United Kingdom by reminding us how alien are the people who live across the borders. It has already given us several examples of the peculiarities to be found in Northern Ireland, and last week, in *Ploughman’s Share* [...] we had an offering from BBC Scotland which gave us a glimpse of rural (Ayresshire?) life [sic] that must have puzzled practically every viewer south of Berwick (Hazel Holt).<sup>3</sup>

#### 4.1. Introduction

In January 1984, BBC Drama Serials Head Jonathan Powell recalls pitching the idea of *EastEnders* (1985- ) to managers, including BBC1 Controller Alan Hart, who were very supportive but asked one pointed question: ‘Are you right to set it in the south?’<sup>4</sup> This Chapter analyses how Play for Today (PFT) represented the constituent nations of the United Kingdom: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Contrastingly to John

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<sup>1</sup> Parker, S. (1986) *Dramatis Personae*, in: G. Dawe (ed.) (2008) *Dramatis Personae and Other Writings*. Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 19.

<sup>2</sup> Plater, A. (2000) ‘The Age of Innocence’, in: J. Bignell & S. Lacey (eds.) (2014) *British Television Drama: Past, Present and Future*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 111.

<sup>3</sup> Holt, H. (1979b) Script made it hard going, *Television Today*, 8 Mar, 22.

<sup>4</sup> Buckingham, D. (1987) *Public Secrets: EastEnders and Its Audience*. London: BFI Publishing, 13.

Caughie – who admitted his lack of textual attention to ‘actually existing Scottish television’, while preferring to advocate for ‘the possibility of a Scottish television’ – my work advances a quantitative and qualitative analysis of PFT’s coverage of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and Northern England.<sup>5</sup>

Chapter 4 will address the following research questions:

- 1. How representative was PFT of the various UK nations and regions, in terms of settings and accents?
- 2. How far were PFTs set in the nations and regions actually commissioned and made *by* the nations and regions?
- 3. How do these more regionally diverse PFTs represent their specific settings? What are their most common representational motifs?
- 4. Did PFTs set far outside London provide Radical Agitational Issue-Based Drama (RAID) or was it more humanist or human-centric?

In order to address these questions, this Chapter opens with a summary of literature on wider screen representations of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the North of England. This is followed by four gazetteers, each aiming to attain a breadth of coverage of a large, representative sample of practically all PFTs set in these nations and regions. Lastly, there will be three case-studies, *Just Your Luck* (1972), *Thicker than Water* (1980) and *A Coming to Terms for Billy* (1984), analysed for how they depict regional and national identity and whether PFT provided a pluralism of voices or not. These especially resonant case-studies are chosen as they demonstrate how PFT evolved towards greater regional autonomy, incorporated ambitious overseas filming and characters returning in a manner akin to soap opera.<sup>6</sup>

Practically beyond this study’s scope are PFTs set primarily abroad; at least 13 PFTs were set outside the UK. Instances of overseas climes realised in the studio include Namibia in *Child of Hope* (1975), Tokyo, Japan in *The Kamikaze Ground Staff Reunion Dinner* and New York, USA in *Before Water Lilies* (both 1981) and Jamaica within *In the Beautiful Caribbean* (1972) (see Chapter 5). This Chapter’s North of England case-study *Thicker than Water* (1980) primarily takes place in France; Brian Glover and Tara Prem’s comedy-drama – the second PFT in its decade-long history to include overseas filming on a

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<sup>5</sup> Caughie, J. (1982) Scottish Television: What Would It Look Like? in: C. McArthur (ed.) *Scotch Reels: Scotland in Cinema and Television*. London: British Film Institute, 115.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to four spin-off series, the Billy trilogy (1982-84) was the third intra-PFT series following the Party (1975-77) and Dominick Hide (1980-82) diptychs.

mainland location – is also a rare anomaly in representing Northern characters encountering another culture.<sup>7</sup>

Following textual analysis, there will be analysis of critical and audience discourses regarding the case-studies, testing whether critics' perceptions of the unintelligibility of non-metropolitan PFTs (see Chapter 3) extended more widely. Beginning respectively in Greenock, Chorley and Belfast, the case-studies are selected as they typify the settings used within their geographically-defined sub-sets, but also due to their salience to PFT's evolution. *Thicker than Water* develops a Northern comedic tendency represented by Peter Terson's Art-Abe-Ern trilogy of travelogue comedies (1972-74), while being a vivid, exceptional engagement with Britain's European destiny. This was a significant development in being the fullest expression of PFT's under-the-radar leitmotif of Britain's European integration.<sup>8</sup>

## **4.2. Literature Reviews**

### **4.2.1. Scotland**

In the landmark polemic *Scotch Reels* (1982), Cairns Craig, Murray Grigor and Colin McArthur establish how the twin traditions of Kailyard and Tartanry were deeply hegemonic discourses of Scottishness across film, television (hereafter TV), music and literature and consumer products. These traditions show a fixed, inert presentation of national identity: Kailyard recycling ideas of parochial rural insularity and Tartanry an ersatz appropriation of the fashions and Romanticism of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Jacobite Rebellion. Their combined effect reflected a nostalgic and conservative retreat from modernity. For Craig, these myths have been invented to 'conceal' how most Scottish people live and preclude the 'possibility of significant change directed from within the Scottish community itself'.<sup>9</sup> Nostalgic for a lost radicalism, Douglas Allen invokes the Workers' Film culture of the 1920s-40s, hoping to inspire 'the revival of a popular Scottish film culture' that transcends the 'music-hall image of Billy Connolly and the social problem exposés' of the BBC's PFT.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Following *Your Man from Six Counties* (1976) (hereafter *Your Man*), most of which was shot in the Republic of Ireland. *A Passage to England* (1975) was shot mostly at sea, though some scenes are filmed in Amsterdam.

<sup>8</sup> In a PFT viewing group discussion, Sukhdev Sandhu noted the French onions hanging in the Northern home in Julia Jones's *The Piano* (1971) (Zoom, 06/01/2021).

<sup>9</sup> Craig, C. (1982) Myths Against History: Tartanry and Kailyard in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Scottish Literature, in: McArthur (ed.) op. cit. 13.

<sup>10</sup> Allen, D. (1982) Workers' Films: Scotland's Hidden Culture, in: McArthur (ed.) ibid. 98.

Pam Cook challenges how the *Scotch Reels* writers' desire to find a more 'authentic' construction of national identity makes them ignore that which 'achieves leadership by consent at any given moment'.<sup>11</sup> Cook criticises McArthur's perspective as an avant-garde intellectual dissociating 'himself from the popular'; however, while McArthur and Caughie comparatively neglect TV texts, McArthur *has* elsewhere appraised the populist, carnival-esque pleasures of John McGrath's work for TV.<sup>12</sup> As Chapter 3 revealed, McGrath's modernist PFT *The Cheviot, The Stag and The Black, Black Oil* (1974) (hereafter *The Cheviot*) was well-received by 4.19 million UK viewers: thus, McArthur's championing of its left-wing Scottish nationalism complicates Cook's perception that he sees the popular as 'ideologically impure'.<sup>13</sup> The soft-left civic nationalist Scottish Nationalist Party's ongoing long-term political success shows that *The Cheviot* and *Scotch Reels* were at the vanguard in their self-determinative assertiveness: in 2014, 45% of participating Scots voted for Scottish Independence in the referendum.

John Caughie bemoans how left-wing theatre naturalism, nurtured via Glasgow's Unity Theatre in the 1940s, is, like modernism, absent from Scottish TV drama.<sup>14</sup> Caughie sweepingly ignores *The Cheviot*, despite its constituting exemplary televisual modernism in presenting history experimentally, enabling 'pleasure and analysis'.<sup>15</sup> Still more numerically overlooked are the Scottish PFTs which explicitly built on Unity Theatre's tradition: BBC Scotland's first PFT, *The Bevallars* (1974), adapted Roddy McMillan's 1973 stage-play; the actor McMillan had trained and worked at the Unity and, later, the Glasgow Citizen's Company. Caughie ignores such single dramas which presented a drastically different representational repertoire to what he claims are exemplars of a dominant Kailyardry: *Dr. Finlay's Casebook* (1962-71) and *Take the High Road* (1980-2003).<sup>16</sup>

While PFT's Scottish corpus is seldom *explicitly* politically challenging, it is a neglected body of TV dramas that depicts working-class communities in a naturalistic mode. The strand's Scottish plays upend conventional uses of heritage; the mostly historically-set adaptations of short-stories by Lewis Grassie Gibbon and George Mackay Brown are more politically challenging than the average contemporary-set Scottish PFT. Debatably, Duncan Petrie describes John McGrath's *Orkney* (1971), which adapts three of Mackay Brown's

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<sup>11</sup> Cook, P. (1996) *Fashioning the Nation: Costume and Identity in British Cinema*. London: BFI, 25.

<sup>12</sup> Cook, P. *ibid*; McArthur, C. (1978) *Television and History*. London: British Film Institute.

<sup>13</sup> Cook, P. *ibid*.

<sup>14</sup> Caughie (1982) *op. cit.* 119-122.

<sup>15</sup> McArthur (1978) *op. cit.* 51.

<sup>16</sup> Caughie (1982) *op. cit.* 120.

stories, as ‘elegiac’, implying it is constrained within nostalgic discourses.<sup>17</sup> However, its 1871 and 1971-set stories respectively critique economic inequalities, overseen by the Laird and the Minister of the Kirk, and the Orcadian community’s insularity.

‘Clydesideism’ is defined by John Caughie as ‘the mythology of the Scottish twentieth century, the discourse which seems currently most potent, and not yet universally acknowledged as mythology’.<sup>18</sup> Amid deindustrialisation and the growth of the ‘feminine domain’ of consumption, masculinity ‘increasingly identifies itself with the “hard man” for whom anguish, cynicism and violence are the only ways to recover the lost dignity of labour’.<sup>19</sup> Caughie identified this mythical representation with Bill Bryden’s tenure of Head of Drama at BBC Scotland (1984-93), characterised by William McIlvanney and Peter McDougall dramas which held onto a masculine identity, while that world’s certainties had been upended by deindustrialisation.<sup>20</sup> Petrie perceives McDougall’s focus on pessimistic, skiving hard men, while also being critical of how his TV plays offer ‘no coherent analysis of the social forces that created’ such protagonists and claims McDougall mythologises them in ‘Wild West’ or ‘gangster’-like manner.<sup>21</sup>

Petrie claims that producer Pharic Maclaren and BBC Scotland’s Head of Drama Roderick Graham (1976-84) ‘had tended to produce material initiated and controlled by the drama department in London’.<sup>22</sup> According to oral histories I have gathered from BBC Scotland PFT writers, the BBC actually did grant Glasgow significant autonomy: Alma Cullen recalls being approached by Maclaren following her work for Granada, while Alan Clews explains that Maclaren and Graham respectively commissioned his two PFTs and Marcella Evaristi that hers was commissioned by Graham.<sup>23</sup> None of these writers believe that London was pulling the strings, arguing that Maclaren and Graham had freedom to initiate drama of *their* choosing.

While this chapter will argue that McDougall’s work is unfairly pigeonholed by a ‘Clydesideism’ discourse, Duncan Petrie and John Cook perceive a masculinist bias in Bill Bryden’s tenure at BBC Scotland. Bryden commissioned very few women writers, preferring established figures McIlvanney and McDougall, who is reported to have

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<sup>17</sup> Petrie, D. (2000) *Screening Scotland*. London: BFI Publishing, 132.

<sup>18</sup> Caughie, J. (1990) Representing Scotland: New Questions for Scottish Cinema, in: E. Dick (ed.) *From Limelight to Satellite: A Scottish Film Book*. London: BFI, 16.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Petrie (2000) op. cit. 134-140; Petrie, D. (2004) *Contemporary Scottish Fictions – Film, Television and the Novel*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 17-38, 55

<sup>21</sup> Petrie (2004) *ibid.* 28; Petrie (2000) *ibid.* 139.

<sup>22</sup> Petrie (2000) *ibid.* 140.

<sup>23</sup> Cullen, A. (2020a) Interview with author, 27 Mar; Clews, A. (2021) Email to author, 21 Oct; Evaristi, M. (2021) Email to author, 15 Oct.

responded with disbelief that Bryden was to be replaced by Andrea Calderwood, a ‘wee lassie’.<sup>24</sup> While not accusing Bryden of gendered bias, Evaristi ascribes the lack of repeats for her well-received PFT comedy *Eve Set the Balls of Corruption Rolling* (1982) (*Eve*) to his influence.<sup>25</sup>

#### 4.2.2. Wales

In a detailed historical account of TV drama, Dave Berry situates PFT writer Alun Owen and actors Hywel Bennett and Rachel Roberts within an upsurge of working-class representation in the 1950s and 1960s – though without mentioning Owen’s *Pal* (1971), Bennett’s two PFT appearances or Roberts’s central role in the popular *Back of Beyond* (1974).<sup>26</sup> Nor does Berry give any consideration to Julia Jones or The Wednesday Play (TWP) dramatist and major modernist novelist James Hanley, who shared with Owen and Jones a mixed Merseyside-Welsh identity, nor TWP authors Alun Richards and Raymond Williams.<sup>27</sup>

Berry perceives a rich seam of Welsh film production from 1977-94: spearheaded by Bedwas-born director Karl Francis, whose extensive work he compares to Bill Douglas and Ken Loach in its left-wing humanism – alongside independent and workshop films facilitated by Channel Four, an evolving BBC and the Workshop Declaration of 1982.<sup>28</sup> Berry cites Francis’s broadside against the under-representation of the working-class, English-speaking south Wales city and Valleys communities, compounded by Ffilm Cymru and the Wales Film Council preferring to fund Welsh language films like the formally and socially conservative *O.M.* (1990).<sup>29</sup>

Comparably, Berry notes BBC Wales’s Head of Drama during the 1980s John Hefin’s admission that its TV drama production in his time and before was too reliant on literary sources and explicitly contradictory to the sort of challenging contemporary material that Berry values in the Welsh representational mix alongside genre productions.<sup>30</sup> Berry commends McArthur and others’ *Scotch Reels* intervention regarding discourses of Scottishness, calling for Welsh filmmakers to emulate how Scottish filmmakers had

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<sup>24</sup> Petrie (2004) op. cit. 142-143, 147; Cook, J.R. (2008) Three Ring Circus: Television Drama about, by and for Scotland, in: N. Blain & D. Hutchison (eds.) *The Media in Scotland*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 115-117.

<sup>25</sup> Evaristi op. cit.

<sup>26</sup> Berry, D. (1996) *Wales and Cinema: The First Hundred Years*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 274-275, 358-360, 470-471, 479. Berry refers to Welsh actors Stanley Baker, Richard Burton and Rachel Roberts as helping British cinema to ‘slough off its middle-class past’ (8).

<sup>27</sup> Richards’s *The Big Breaker* (1964) is a time capsule of civic corruption in the Valleys.

<sup>28</sup> Berry op. cit. 4, 8, 9, 344-354, 375-398.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 429.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 355.

assertively obtained more funding to advance the Scottish industry.<sup>31</sup> While PFT was renowned for its copious annual output of challenging, contemporary drama, this Chapter will chart its sometimes uneven geographical coverage of the UK.

### 4.2.3. Northern Ireland

Brian McIlroy notes filmmakers' widespread elision of Northern Ireland Protestantism, or its conflation with the British government as the 'coloniser' in too simplistic a binary to the 'colonised' Catholics; highlighting Northern Ireland's 60:40 population split between Protestants and Catholics.<sup>32</sup> McIlroy cites historian Tom Nairn on how 'anti-imperialist' myths about the Troubles are advanced in Hollywood, British and Irish film output, which outnumbers Northern Ireland's limited indigenous film industry.<sup>33</sup> Analysing a range of 1985-90 TV dramas and films by PFT directors Alan Clarke, Mike Leigh and Ken Loach, McIlroy finds Clarke's and Leigh's 'soft nationalist' films to have immersive, complex representations of Northern Irish life, unlike Loach's 'hard nationalist' *Hidden Agenda* (1990), which deterministically shoehorns the Troubles into its conspiracy narrative.<sup>34</sup> He claims that Loach's binary perspective results from his chosen identification with 'the Catholic, not the Protestant, working-class'.<sup>35</sup>

Richard Hoggart and Rob Ritchie claim that the PFT *Shadows on our Skin* (1980) (hereafter *Shadows*) was the first screen representation of a Catholic family in Northern Ireland but that Protestant families were neglected.<sup>36</sup> McIlroy notes that BBC Northern Ireland, via Graham Reid's Billy trilogy, addressed this with its soap-opera like representation 'of a certain ethos of the "Troubles" in working-class Protestant Belfast'.<sup>37</sup> McIlroy alludes to unattributed criticisms of Reid's trilogy for how its 'hidebound' working-class representations limit its socio-political dimensions.<sup>38</sup> McIlroy claims that 11 of 27 BBC Northern Ireland TV dramas from 1980 to 1987 were written by Graham Reid: this was actually a *higher* percentage, 42.3%, than McIlroy implies, given that he cites Stewart Parker's PFT *Catchpenny Twist* (1977) as broadcast in 1980.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 435-436.

<sup>32</sup> McIlroy, B. (1998) *Shooting to Kill: Filmmaking and the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland*. Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 22, 25.

<sup>33</sup> Nairn, T. (1995) On the Threshold, *London Review of Books*, 23 Mar [online] Available at: <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v17/n06/tom-nairn/on-the-threshold> [accessed: 14/10/2021].

<sup>34</sup> McIlroy op. cit. 87-98.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 14.

<sup>36</sup> Hoggart, R. (1980) Ulster: a 'switch-off' TV subject, *Listener*, 28 Feb, 261; Ritchie, R. (1984) Out of the North, in: Hutchinson, R. *Rat In The Skull*. London: Methuen, 3.

<sup>37</sup> McIlroy op. cit. 100-101.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 110. Parker's play was repeated in August 1979.

While he analyses a rich range of TV drama representations of Northern Ireland from 1985-94, McIlroy elides Protestant PFT writers or adapters Stewart Parker, Maurice Leitch and Derek Mahon, though acknowledges Reid's trilogy's cultural importance, as symbolised by its full repeat in 1987. John Hill details how Protestant writer Sam Thompson's Wednesday Play *Cemented with Love* (1965), which dramatised electoral fraud perpetrated by Ulster Unionists, had its planned December 1964 transmission halted by BBC Northern Ireland Controller Robert McCall, which showed the Unionist establishment's sway with the BBC.<sup>40</sup> Hill has also recounted the fraught history of Catholic playwright Dominic Behan's formally experimental and politically contentious PFT *Carson Country* (1972). While the Director-General Charles Curran wrote to Home Secretary Willie Whitelaw over his anxieties, the BBC did broadcast it in October 1972, the year of Bloody Sunday and Bloody Friday, in which the British Army and the IRA respectively killed 13 and 9 people.<sup>41</sup> While BBC1 Controller David Attenborough insisted on cuts to one scene, bosses were keen to avoid banning it, while also not wanting ITV to beat them by showing Behan's other play *The Folk Singer* (1972) first.<sup>42</sup>

Echoing McIlroy's unattributed criticisms of the Billy trilogy, Hill is critical of how *Shadows* de-politicises the Troubles via its narrowly-focused, family-centric narrative.<sup>43</sup> Conversely, Peter McDougall has been criticised for his pessimistic perspective on family life and excessive empathy for male protagonists who invariably seek *escape* from the home.<sup>44</sup> Thus, critical binaries pit the domestic against both socio-political issues and masculinity.

#### 4.2.4. The North of England

This study defines the North of England according to the 'seven-county North' of pre-1974 boundaries – Northumberland, Cumberland, Westmorland, Durham, Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cheshire – rather than via dialect, the Severn-Wash line or 'far' or 'near' Norths.<sup>45</sup> There is a myth that the North's harsh weather produces tough people who use language bluntly.<sup>46</sup> Studies of screen representation perceive how Northern lives are often shown as

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<sup>40</sup> Hill, J. (2006) *Cinema and Northern Ireland*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 156.

<sup>41</sup> Hill, J. (2017) Dominic Behan and the Beginnings of Television Troubles Drama, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, (37)1, 65-81.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* 72-73.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* 77.

<sup>44</sup> Petrie (2004) *op. cit.* 28.

<sup>45</sup> Russell, D. (2004) *Looking North: Northern England and the national imagination*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, xii.

<sup>46</sup> Wales, K. (2006) *Northern English: A Social and Cultural History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 25.

'bleak and desolate'.<sup>47</sup> Dave Russell notes how Alan Plater in *Trinity Tales* (1975) communicates a powerful enmity against the South and how Victoria Wood pointedly questions patronising metropolitan myths concerning Northern bleakness.<sup>48</sup>

Contemporary Northern feelings against the South are rooted in economic trends which accelerated post-1979 under Conservative rule. Journalist Ian Jack noted how 94% 'of *all* jobs lost' during 1979-86 were north of the Severn-Wash line.<sup>49</sup> David Smith perceives a 'North-South divide' in GDP per head, illustrated in how nine of the 10 local labour-market areas which benefited most from Thatcher's governments' policies were in the South East; five of the 10 areas which lost out most were in the North of England and another four were in Scotland.<sup>50</sup> These included, from the worst affected downwards: Greenock, Castleford & Pontefract, Sunderland, Liverpool, Paisley and St Helens, all of which featured in PFT as locations, narrative sources or primary settings. More broadly, characters who inhabit Northern screen spaces tend to experience economic hardships or unfair situations at home or work.

Perceptions of the region as peripheral are matched by its neglect as a base or setting for British film production: just 4% of British fictional features films from 1941-46 were set there.<sup>51</sup> The British New Wave (1956-63) saw Northern settings become more fashionable in films, which crossed over into TV, especially via Alun Owen's Armchair Theatre plays, including *Lena, O My Lena* (1960), set in a Salford food wholesalers' factory. More recently, PFT actor Barrie Rutter's Halifax-founded theatre company Northern Broadsides (1992- ) represents a Northern cultural assertion that builds on the pithy, independent-minded Plater and Wood in its dedication to performing drama in Northern accents.

Stuart Laing sees representations of the North in *Z Cars* (1962-78) as characterised by 'hard humour' and violence: it is a man's country, with independent women, but where there are 'fights in the pubs and husbands hitting wives'.<sup>52</sup> Academic study of film and TV centres most on the North West, discerning the centrality of women performers. Long-running ITV soap opera *Coronation Street* (1960- ) balances familiarity and change, its textual meanings being, in Christine Geraghty's words, 'cemented together by gossip',

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<sup>47</sup> Mazierska, E. (ed.) (2017) *Heading North: The North of England in Film and Television*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 21; Gyori, Z. (2017) From North to East: Children and the Spatial Allegory of Entrapment in Ken Loach's *Kes* and Csaba Bollok's *Iska's Journey*, in: Mazierska (ed.) (2017) *ibid.* 259.

<sup>48</sup> Russell (2004) *op. cit.* 202.

<sup>49</sup> Jack, I. (1987) *Before the Oil Ran Out: Britain 1977-86*. London: Secker & Warburg, ix.

<sup>50</sup> Smith, D. (1994) [1989] *North and South: Britain's Economic, Social and Political Divide*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 129-133.

<sup>51</sup> Mazierska (2017) *op. cit.* 14.

<sup>52</sup> Laing, S. (1986) *Representations of Working Class Life 1957-1964*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 172.

while pleasurable escape is invariably to Lancashire seaside resort Blackpool.<sup>53</sup> Hannah Andrews, David Forrest and Beth Johnson explain how women actors such as Lancastrian Jane Horrocks and Mancunian Lesley Sharp convey, respectively, ‘down-to-earth, no-nonsense, seemingly authentic Northern-ness’ and ‘extraordinarily subtle performances’ of ‘Northern-ness (and class)’ through gesture, voice and movement.<sup>54</sup> For Forrest and Johnson, Sharp destabilises ‘the “myth” of Northern space that has been conceived of historically as dominantly morose and male’.<sup>55</sup> Giving overdue attention to the North East, James Leggott has identified a range of wistful or celebratory screen representations of the area’s economic transition from masculine heavy industry to leisure and consumption via deindustrialisation.<sup>56</sup> Leggott tracks how writer Tom Hadaway expanded his focus from the deeply masculine-centred PFT *The Happy Hunting Ground* (1976) to a range TV dramas he wrote for BBC and Channel Four which illuminated the toughness and vitality of historical and contemporary North East women.<sup>57</sup>

Comparing drama productions at ITV’s Granada in Manchester and the BBC’s English Regions Drama unit in Birmingham, Lez Cooke delineates Granada’s intensely local ‘telenovel’ cycle from 1970-81, spearheaded by writer John Finch.<sup>58</sup> The ERD produced more tonally and geographically varied dramas under David Rose’s visionary leadership, a ‘foregrounding [of] regional and cultural diversity’, which Laura Mayne claims Rose continued as commissioning editor of Fiction at Channel 4 from 1981-90.<sup>59</sup> Cooke notes that Granada neglected Liverpool, compared with ERD, who gave Willy Russell and Alan Bleasdale a start in TV writing and Channel Four, which broadcast Granada’s later spin-off series from Bleasdale’s PFT *Scully’s New Year’s Eve* (1978), *Scully* (1984).<sup>60</sup> Cooke sees Bleasdale’s landmark Pebble Mill-made *Boys from the Blackstuff* (1982) as a culmination of the authored single-play tradition; a terminus which heralded the turn into longer-form serial drama, which was subsequently dominated by period dramas from literary sources.

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<sup>53</sup> Geraghty, C. (1981) *The Continuous Serial – a Definition*, in: R. Dyer et al. *Coronation Street*. London: BFI Publishing, 26; Mazierska, E. (ed.) (2020) *Blackpool in Film and Popular Music*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>54</sup> Andrews, H. (2016) ‘No-nonsense-two-up-two-down-by-gum-you-daft-ha’poth-Northernness’: Jane Horrocks, Gracie Fields and performing generic Northernness, *Journal of Popular Television*, (4)2, 225; Forrest, D. & Johnson, B. (2016) Lesley Sharp and the alternative geographies of Northern English stardom, *Journal of Popular Television*, (4)2, 210.

<sup>55</sup> Forrest & Johnson *ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Leggott, J. (2021) *The North East of England on Film and Television*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 45-62.

<sup>58</sup> Cooke, L. (2012) *A Sense of Place: Regional British television drama, 1956-82*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 99-109.

<sup>59</sup> Cooke *ibid.* 110-177; Mayne, L. (2012) ‘Creative Commissioning’: Examining the Regional Aesthetic in the Work of Channel 4’s First Commissioning Editor for Fiction, David Rose, *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, (9)1, 40-57.

<sup>60</sup> Cooke *ibid.* 52.

Cooke highlights how ERD saw PFT as its most prestigious showcase: most of BBC Birmingham's 39 hour-long-plus PFTs were filmed, whereas the Second City Firsts (BBC2, 1973-78) strand, a vital enabling laboratory for new writers and directors, largely used the video-studio (VS) aesthetic. Cooke perceives Peter Terson's Art-Abe-Ern trilogy (1972-74) as the epitome of Pebble Mill's often lighter-toned approach, citing highly appreciative audience reception of these comedies which signified their regionalism through 'dialect and setting': its trio of Leeds miners travel to Whitby, Stratford-upon-Avon and Doncaster, respectively.<sup>61</sup> ERD was intensely conscious of geography; its leaders saw their mission as distinctively non-metropolitan. Barry Hanson, David Rose's deputy, recalls how in Pebble Mill's early days, Rose 'hung a map of the British Isles on his office wall with black-inked arrows pointing to which region was to be blessed next with our Medician beneficence. The feeling that it was the rest of the country against London was strong'.<sup>62</sup>

### **4.3. Gazetteers – representation of the Nations and Regions in PFT**

**Sue Moss** (Judy Liebert): They do work, then?  
**Terry** (David Daker): Oh, bloody hard, when they go...  
**Sue**: What do they live on?  
**Terry**: Beer...  
(PFT *Keep an Eye on Albert*, 1975)

This section uses quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse PFT's representations of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the North of England. Quantitatively, it utilises the mean average UK population data by region and nation from the 1971 and 1981 censuses, alongside extensive viewing of PFT, to discern how democratically representative PFT was in its use of non-metropolitan settings and accents.<sup>63</sup> Qualitative analysis draws on the viewing and reading of over 100 PFTs to identify significant representational patterns.

#### **4.3.1. Scotland**

Scottish people constituted 9.3% of the UK population, and there were 21 PFTs whose primary setting was Scotland: 7.1%, a *slight* under-representation. 14 were made by the Glasgow-based BBC Scotland, while seven were made by BBC London, the latter usually involving filmed excursions to Scottish locations. 12 of the 21 Scottish PFTs are set in the West Central Lowlands urban area: five in Glasgow, five in Greenock and two in, or featuring characters from, Paisley – like the interned Italian-Scottish family in *Aliens* (1982). East or Central Lowlands PFTs include two set in Edinburgh, one likely set in

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 126.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 112.

<sup>63</sup> The data is from Halsey, A.H. & Webb, J. (eds.) (2000) *Twentieth-Century British Social Trends*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 425.

Stirlingshire or Ayrshire and another in Perthshire. The latter pair have rural settings like the North East Scotland-set *Orkney*, or the Aberdeenshire-set PFTs *Clay*, *Smeddum and Greenden* (1976) and *Donal and Sally* (1978). *The Cheviot* features a filmed theatrical performance by 7:84, shot in Dornie Hall, Inverness-shire in North West Scotland, alongside Isles of Lewis and Uist and Aberdeen locations.

John McGrath's *The Cheviot* is the sole Scottish PFT with a *directly* politicised scope, possessing an even deeper historical sweep than McGrath's earlier adaptation of George Mackay Brown's *Orkney* stories, which had spanned 1871-1971. McGrath's PFT covers 229 years from the Battle of Culloden in 1745 to the current North Sea oil 'boom'. It trenchantly dramatises the Highland Clearances and the repression of Gaelic of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, then satirises local and English elites' appropriation of the Tartan clothing of the people they had dispossessed and physically displaced for the profitable cheviot sheep, and later how they hunted the stag, for blood sport.

For this TV version of 7:84's 1973 stage play that had toured widely around Scotland, McGrath and director John Mackenzie included vox pop interviews with oil rig workers communicating grievances over pay, unsafe working conditions and people being priced out of the Aberdeen housing market. This documentarian televisual approach fulfils McGrath's theatrical intention to give spectators 'the news that isn't passed on' via the newspapers or TV.<sup>64</sup> Philip Purser decried this PFT film's partiality and Seán Day-Lewis disapproved of its deviation from conventionally naturalistic drama.<sup>65</sup> However, more London-based critics acclaimed it as 'hugely enjoyable', appreciating vigorous performances and the inclusion of the Dornie Hall audience.<sup>66</sup> Chris Dunkley saw its articulation of a trenchant left-wing narrative as a timely counterbalance to the bland concealments offered by purportedly 'balanced' TV programmes.<sup>67</sup>

More typically, Scottish PFTs offered naturalistic drama-from-below, primarily centred in working-class communities, which possessed submerged political significance, but were more concerned with work, leisure and human relationships. Exemplifying this is Alan Clews's *The Good Time Girls* (1981), concerning two Paisley working-class oil-rig 'widows' exploring new freedoms while their husbands are away on the North Sea Oil rigs

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<sup>64</sup> McGrath, interviewed in: *Arena – Theatre: 'Playwrights of the 70s'* (1977).

<sup>65</sup> Purser, P. (1974) An improper gas, *Sunday Telegraph*, 9 Jun, 15; Day-Lewis, S. (1974) Attack on the ruling class lacks drama, *Daily Telegraph*, 7 Jun, 13.

<sup>66</sup> Usher, S. (1974b) A battlecry for a lost cause, *Daily Mail*, 7 Jun, 21; Banks-Smith, N. (1974) Television, *Guardian*, 7 Jun, 10; Lennon, P. (1974) Behind the bonanza, *Sunday Times*, 9 Jun, 37; Dunkley, C. (1974) Not like the real thing, *Financial Times*, 12 Jun, 3; Thomas, J. (1974) Striking it rich with a profitable formula, *Daily Express*, 7 Jun, 12.

<sup>67</sup> Dunkley *ibid.*

off Aberdeen. Clews includes a telling, if notably compartmentalised, political exchange. At a house party, a man in round glasses claims that, ‘Scotland is an underdeveloped country! Part of the Third World [...] Scotland is too obsessed with the past to care about the present, never mind the future!’ to which a bearded man (Iain Ormsby-Knox) angrily responds: ‘Scotland’s a great wee nation!’ while grabbing him by the jumper and slapping his face. Beyond this, men tell jokes about religious sectarianism; different men and women dance to disco and rock music and kiss.

The romantic, underdog nationalism advocated in *The Cheviot* is undermined here in how Clews makes lead character Nancy Park (Phyllis Logan) singly focused on the hedonistic pleasures of infidelity; she expresses no wider views. We later see the bearded man dancing with a cigarette in his mouth, palpably wearing a kilt, attempting, sartorially, to reclaim Tartanry for Scottish nationalism. An Accordionist (Sandy Moir) and a Singer (Dalzell McKenzie) perform Andy Stewart’s maudlin 1961 hit single ‘A Scottish Soldier’, encouraging a communal singalong, which is only half-heartedly enacted, with one reveller asking: ‘Come on, Granda, play something with a bit more life in it!’<sup>68</sup> Next, they perform an English version of the Belgian pop song ‘Y Viva España’, popularised by Sylvia in 1974. Many partygoers fondly sing along to a song which evokes their experiences of holidays to Spain; this is followed by several upbeat traditional Scottish reels, also well-received, signifying that folk culture is widely enjoyed when danceable. Thus, there is a commonality with *The Cheviot*’s buoyant musical performances, though the play’s covert ideology is secular liberalism.

Scottish PFTs generally present masculine environments, with 69.8% of roles being male and 30.2% being female – though women figure more in BBC Scotland PFTs (32.5%) than in Scottish-set PFTs made from London (26.9%). The picture is fractionally fairer concerning the top-three billed roles in the end-credits: women have 34.9% of these and 35.7% of lead parts in BBC Scotland’s PFTs. The three Scottish PFTs with a majority of roles and top-billed roles for women were made from Glasgow: Alma Cullen’s *Degree of Uncertainty*, Bill Craig’s adaptation of William McIlvanney’s novel *A Gift from Nessus* (1980) and Marcella Evaristi’s *Eve*. These are exceptions to Scottish PFTs’ androcentric nature. However, raw quantitative data should not obscure Hannah Gordon’s superlative performance in *Orkney* as troubled, solitary, alcoholic Celia, which includes a 14-and-a-

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<sup>68</sup> Henry Livings’s Northern England-set PFT *The Mayor’s Charity* (1977) features an embarrassingly outdated, ripe performance of this same song. Curiously, Livings’s play included filmed inserts shot in Dundee: Dear, J. (2022) *The Mayor’s Charity*, **Play for Today – Volume Three** [BluRay, BFIB1443], booklet, 28.

half minute monologue, and offbeat comedic turns like Miriam Margoyles's in *The Thin End of the Wedge* (1977) and John Grieve's virtuoso music-hall drag act in *Ploughman's Share*. Among others, Claire Nielson, Jan Wilson, Janette Foggo and Eileen McCallum give varied, skilful performances across multiple PFTs.

Data reflects how PFT creators felt the realist imperative to delineate life within male-dominated workplaces recognisable to viewers. Scottish PFTs chronologically dramatised crofting and farming (*Orkney*, 1971; *The Cheviot*, 1974; *Clay, Smeddum and Greenden*, 1976; *Ploughman's Share*, 1979), oil rigging (*The Cheviot*; *The Good Time Girls*, 1981), glass bevelling (*The Bevellers*, 1974), shipbuilding including riveting (*Willie Rough*, 1976; *Just A Boys' Game*, 1979), retail (*Degree of Uncertainty*, 1979), carpet manufacturing (*The Slab Boys*, 1979), sales (*A Gift from Nessus*, 1980) and bottling and packing (*The Silly Season*, 1982). By contrast, *Charades* (1977) expands on the second third of *The Cheviot* in centring on the idle English rich, who have private wealth and a housekeeper. The posh-voiced Annabel (Rosalind Ayres) speaks of work being 'such a bore', implying she has never worked.

While this realism justification works for the androcentric *The Bevellers*, it does not for Stephen Mulrine's *The Silly Season*. Alastair (Iain Lauchlan) notes how the bottling factory staff consists of three-quarters women, claiming that the union is weak because women are too moderate, but – in stark contrast to Colin Welland's *Leeds United!* – Mulrine omits these working-class women's voices. However, Scottish PFT do not uncritically relay their masculine environments, but subtly criticise them. In Peter McDougall's work, regarded by John Cook as having an 'ultra-masculinist emphasis', male behaviour is intensely conveyed without overt didacticism, enabling viewers' critical responses to 'hard man' culture – see this Chapter's Scottish case-study.<sup>69</sup> Historically declining employment levels in industrial areas inflect 1976-84 PFTs by McDougall, Sean McCarthy and Hugh D. McManus. The significant outlier to this centring on single industries or unemployment is *Eve*, a vivacious comedy centring on a school reunion at a Glasgow Catholic girls' school which depicts the interactions between varied working women (see Chapter 5).

Concerning class, PFT challenged the conventional view of Edinburgh as well-heeled and middle-class and Glasgow as rough and working-class long before Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* did.<sup>70</sup> Alma Cullen's Edinburgh-set *Degree of Uncertainty* concerns

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<sup>69</sup> Cook, J.R. (2008) op. cit. 117.

<sup>70</sup> In the documentary *Word of Mouth*: Episode 1 – 'The Big Yin and the Wee Yin' (1976), Billy Connolly jokes that a Glasgow funeral has more life in it than an Edinburgh wedding, while linguist Stanley Ellis notes

working-class Josie (Jennie Linden), who, at 40, becomes a mature student of history. Linden's accent unfortunately adheres more to the refined stereotypes of Edinburgh, somewhat muddling the play's effect. Sean McCarthy's critically neglected comedy *The Thin End of the Wedge* possesses a richly distinctive working-class humour. Peter (Tom Marshall) needs to find the money to settle his bills of £19.67, to avert the electricity and heating being cut off in the bedsit flat he shares with his girlfriend Mary (Eileen Nicholas). Peter aims to borrow the money from friends but ends up going on what the play's sole London press reviewer Hazel Holt called 'a pub-crawl round the centre of Edinburgh'.<sup>71</sup> Holt bemoans this 'quasi-picaresque', bohemian play, castigating it bafflingly as 'pretentious', feeling unable to identify with what she perceives as 'worthless and unsympathetic drifters and layabouts, with no thought for anything but drink and dope and with no kind of redeeming charm, that a general holocaust would have come as a happy ending'.<sup>72</sup>

West Central Lowlands-set PFTs centre on working-class characters, including the autodidact Eddie Cameron (Ken Hutchison) in *A Gift from Nessus*, an armchair philosopher who would prefer to have stayed working in a bookshop, but whose aspirational social-climbing wife Allison (Alison Key) has made him work as a salesman for an electrical firm. Allison, who buys status symbols for their home, tells Eddie he needs to be 'better' than he is, pressing him to suck up to his boss Sid Morton (Robert Urquhart), who is openly racist at the Camerons' house party and sexual harasses an unnamed woman at an office party. Typically for a Scottish PFT, Eddie commits adultery and the situation receives no narrative closure. Contrastingly, John Byrne's Paisley-set *The Slab Boys* shows the working-class Phil McCann (Billy McColl) and Spanky Farrell (Gerard Kelly) as confined by their bantering repartee. The studious Hector McKenzie (Joseph McKenna), target of their bullying, achieves a promotion to designer, while Phil fails in his attempt to get into art school: *respectable* and the work ethic triumph over *rough* and skiving.

Significantly, the drinking of alcohol features in *all* Scottish PFTs, whether made by London or Glasgow. 19 of the 21 have scenes of alcohol being imbibed in a public house or other licensed establishment, a public park or at home; of those that do not, there is an off-screen lunchtime pint in *The Bevellers* and mention of a 'small beer' in *The Slab*

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perceptively that class may be a greater marker of language than geography. Connolly also claims the English 'haven't tried hard enough' to understand Scottish accents: presciently, given how critics used an intelligibility discourse against the PFT *The Elephants' Graveyard* that Connolly starred in two months later (see Chapter 3).

<sup>71</sup> Holt, H. (1977) Two minor plays: one a success – the other a pretentious failure, *Television Today*, 30 Dec, 13.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

Boys.<sup>73</sup> *Charades* includes references to drinking ‘the famous Straney Punch’, while its stereotypical English characters in their Perthshire estate Glen Straney drink tea; some of whom partake in Tartanry by wearing kilts.

Scottish PfT pub scenes sometimes foreground stupidity, meanness and closed-mindedness. Most bar inhabitants in *Willie Rough*, *Ploughman’s Share* and *The Silly Season* are insular and are negatively juxtaposed with working-class socialist intellectuals. Iain Lauchlan plays youthful socialist students George Brewster and Alastair in the latter pair of PfTs: George, especially, is signified as having greater insight than the drinkers around him. Tragically, neither character can escape from the drinking culture and, thus, by implication, will fail to contribute to beneficial societal change. The last Scottish PfT, Hugh D. McManus’s glum *It Could Happen to Anybody* (1984), bluntly shows the terminal results of endemic alcoholism on a Greenock council estate, as drunken husband Jim McLeod (Joseph Brady) kills his wife Jean (Anne Scott-Jones). Actor Iain Lauchlan expresses personal identification with George in *Ploughman’s Share*, analogising his entrapment with his own discomfort with the drinking culture around Glaswegian theatre, which he escaped by relocating South of the border.<sup>74</sup>

Some Scottish PfTs’ pub scenes convey conviviality, within limits. Beyond a beer-drinking contest, the male and female students in *Degree of Uncertainty* communicate and dance affably, if in circumscribed, individual terms. Jody (Billy Connolly) and Bunny (Jon Morrison) in *The Elephants’ Graveyard* bond over several bottles of wine in a public park in Greenock. For writer Peter McDougall, alcohol figures as a social lubricant enabling deeper communication, exemplified in Jody’s poignant story of how men who go to sea get ‘drunk on each other’s company...’ In McDougall’s earlier *Just Another Saturday* (1975), working-class Catholic Paddy (Billy Connolly) wisely criticises sectarianism when talking with John (Jon Morrison) in a Glasgow boozier after John has witnessed sectarian violence. Paddy aims to defuse tension with a Catholic man – whom he terms a ‘heed-banger’ and who threatens John – via humour. The man tells John: ‘I’m going to damage you. These people are animals...’ to which Paddy responds, with absurd over-statement: ‘Oh, is that right? Well, you’d better save up your Embassy coupons for a Daktari gun! ‘Cos that’s the only way you’re going to get near ’im!’ However, Paddy’s convivial gallows humour fails to avert chaotic violence, which supports Jonathan Murray’s claim that McDougall is a

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<sup>73</sup> In *Aliens*, in addition to another scene of two characters drinking, German Nazi prisoners in the internment camp’s makeshift dining-hall tub-thump boisterously, as if in a beer-hall.

<sup>74</sup> Lauchlan, I. (2022) Interview with author, 14 Jan. Scottish 7:84’s stage play, *Out of Our Heads* (1976) dissected working-class Scottish drinking culture in all its disturbing implications: McGrath, J. (1996) *A Good Night Out. Popular Theatre: Audience, Class and Form*. London: Nick Hern Books, 97.

pessimistic existentialist who depicts ‘individual self-determination’ prevailing over forms of ‘collective organisation’.<sup>75</sup>

#### 4.3.2. Wales

The mean average population of Wales in 1971-81 comprised 5% of the UK, yet only five PFTs are set in Wales: 1.7% of PFT, which reflects the strand’s glaring under-representation of Wales compared to Scotland. Julia Jones, who had Welsh familial roots, wrote two of these. None were made by BBC Wales’s Cardiff-based drama department. Of Wales-set PFTs, only Dennis Potter’s *Joe’s Ark* (1974) and *Back of Beyond* feature protagonists who speak in Welsh accents, while others use idyllic rural South Welsh locations – in Breconshire, Monmouthshire and Powys, respectively – to situate their respectively upbeat (*Still Waters*, 1972) and downbeat (*Packman’s Barn*, 1976; *Z for Zachariah*, 1984) narratives.

*Joe’s Ark* is a powerful, tragic drama of pet shop owner Joe (Freddie Jones) and his student daughter Lucy (Angharad Rees), who dies of cancer near the play’s climax. This video-film hybrid mainly uses the studio for the enclosed spaces of Joe’s pet shop in a South Wales Valleys town, being opened out by 16mm film sequences, including a final shot which pans leftwards across the townscape: finally, we hear and see children in a playground, subtly inferring that life goes on anew amid Joe’s unutterable loss. In Julia Jones’s *Back of Beyond*, Olwen (the famous Llanelli-born actor Rachel Roberts) resides in a decrepit cottage in rural Breconshire, having moved from her native South Wales valleys long ago. Having experienced the Great Depression and her husband’s death, Olwen has withdrawn from life and ekes out a gloomy existence on benefits; only to be reawakened by the sociable teenager Rachel (Lynne Jones). Rachel speaks with a stronger Welsh accent than her RP-speaking middle-class Welsh headmaster father Gareth (Edward Hardwicke) and initially befriends Olwen. Unlike Jones’s whimsical, romantic *Still Waters*, the narrative concludes bleakly with class barriers reasserting themselves as Olwen commits suicide. This PFT features a rare use of Welsh language. While planting seeds that she hopes will become white flowers by the end of the summer, Olwen asks Rachel to ‘cover them up, girach...’ which, in English, means ‘silly’.<sup>76</sup> Given that Jones’s original Camera Script has the line as ‘cover them up, *girl*’ [my emphasis], with a stage-direction

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<sup>75</sup> Murray, J. (2022) Scotch Missed: Play for Today and Scotland, *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, (19)2, 199-205.

<sup>76</sup> PFT contains more Italian and Khoisan words: see *Aliens* and *Desert of Lies* (1984). Or French and Yiddish – see this Chapter’s Northern English case-study and Les Blair’s *Beyond the Pale* (1981), respectively.

instructing Rachel Roberts to speak ‘QUITE COMMANDINGLY’, it seems Roberts may have softened Olwen’s delivery and ad-libbed the warmer, more distinctive vocative.<sup>77</sup>

More typically, PFT featured geographically dispersed Welsh characters. Among at least seven such PFTs, several foreground Welsh communities’ social solidarity and close-knit reciprocity. Suburban London-based Mr and Mrs Cawser (Erik Chitty and Susan Richards) in Dennis Potter’s *Angels Are So Few* (1970) speak, nostalgically, of their livelier past life in a South Wales chapel town. Simon Gray’s *The Man in the Sidecar* (1971) and Brian Clark’s *The Country Party* (1977) signify their Welsh male characters as sociable, shallowly trendy hangers-on. William Trevor’s *O Fat White Woman* (1971) and David Pirie’s *Rainy Day Women* (1984) feature gossiping, irreverent young Welsh women with a self-confident worldliness, but they are powerless within their new locales (see analysis of the latter in Appendix 7).<sup>78</sup>

Elsewhere, Welshness is presented as a strange, hearty and romantic alternative to the dominant English conservatism. In David Rudkin’s *Penda’s Fen* (1974), the Reverend J. Franklin (John Atkinson) tells Stephen (Spencer Banks) that Edward Elgar had some Welsh blood: assisting Stephen’s progression from naïve conservative ethnocentrism to a pluralistic and pagan mind-set. In Robin Chapman’s comedy *Come the Revolution* (1977), the Plumber’s Mates, a left-wing theatre troupe, perform their callow polemical revue in a New Brighton social club populated by Welsh miners. The miners, bored by the didactic performance, heckle and fully supplant the Mates’ performance by bursting into male voice choral song. Plumber’s Mate Mike (Richard O’Callaghan) wants to give up and go home: ‘They’ve got their *own bloody culture...*’ The Plumber’s Mate women Stevie (Deborah Fallender) and Naomi (Myrna Stevens) have already demonstrated they are happy joining the miners in the ensuing conga dancing, which signifies the triumph of Welsh working-class virility over the tepidly middle-class Plumber’s Mate men.

In July 1979, there was talk of BBC Wales contributing more plays to be nationally networked, but it did not subsequently make any PFTs.<sup>79</sup> Robert Marshall’s PFT *Before Water Lilies* (1981) was made at BBC Wales’s Cardiff studio, using their studio staff, but was not originated by BBC Wales, but by BBC London.<sup>80</sup> In a May 1984 preview, Ewart

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<sup>77</sup> Jones, J. (1974) *Back of Beyond – Camera Script*, 75, **Play for Today – Volume One** [BluRay, BFIB1393], disc 2.

<sup>78</sup> See also May, T. (2021b) *Play for Today at 50: Part #2 – ‘O Fat White Woman’ (1971), Opening Negotiations*, 4 Nov [online] Available at: <https://britishcoldwarculture.wordpress.com/2021/11/04/play-for-today-at-50-part-2-o-fat-white-woman-1971/> [accessed: 19/07/2022].

<sup>79</sup> Anon (1979) BBC to broaden scope of its single plays, *Television Today*, 19 Jul, 18.

<sup>80</sup> Charlesworth, A. (2021) Interview with author, 6 Apr.

Alexander's BBC Wales drama about Welsh Guards' experiences serving in the Falklands War was set to be shown 'this winter [...] possibly as a Play for Today'.<sup>81</sup> However, the strand was discontinued after August 1984 and Alexander's drama, the first produced by ex-Head of Plays Keith Williams after leaving his job in April – featuring location filming in Cardiff and use of BBC Wales's studio – surfaced on BBC1 as *The Mimosa Boys* (1985) in a later 10:20pm time slot.<sup>82</sup>

PfT's under-representation of Welsh settings and voices marked a decline from The Wednesday Play, where plays by writers Julia Jones, Alun Richards and Raymond Williams pieces had featured Welsh settings – though Welsh writer Ray Jenkins's *Patterson O.K.* (1969) was set in Scotland! Neither the Rhyl-born Penelope Mortimer's *Three's One* (1973) nor Cardiff-born Andrew Davies's comedy *Bavarian Night* (1981) have Welsh settings: both are set in England. Other Welsh creative input included significant PfT directors Pedr James and James Cellan-Jones – also Head of Plays, 1976-79 – and the producer Innes Lloyd, who made 17 PfTs in a vein markedly different from Garnett, Matheson and Trodd's more politicised works. It is surprising that such distinguished Welsh forces such as TV writer Elaine Morgan and film writer-director Karl Francis never worked on PfT, though Morgan did write *The Burston Rebellion* (1985) for PfT's film-centric successor Screen Two, another of which, *The Silent Twins* (1986), was set in Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire.

#### 4.3.3. Northern Ireland

In 1971-81, Northern Ireland's mean population was 2.7%. However, 12 PfTs were primarily set there, amounting to 4.1% of the strand's output: an extensive coverage surely reflecting Ulster's topicality during 1970-84. Seven of these were made by BBC Northern Ireland, where Neil Zeiger and Chris Parr headed a new Drama unit, founded in 1979 by the Director of Programmes Cecil Taylor, who Zeiger recalls was 'passionate' about making drama from Belfast.<sup>83</sup> Producer Zeiger sorted out logistics, while Parr found the writers; however, Zeiger notes that BBC London was 'very possessive' over BBC money and 'they didn't like giving stuff away to the regions'.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, BBC London made five PfTs using Northern Irish locations, including Stewart Parker's extraordinary, Joycean *Iris*

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<sup>81</sup> Anon (1984) Filming play on Bluff Cove, *Television Today*, 17 May, 21.

<sup>82</sup> This temporal ghettoisation echoed the fate of John Hefin's Peter Terson-like vigorous filmed comedy of a Welsh rugby club in Paris, *Grand Slam* (1978): screened on BBC1, but at 10:46pm on a Friday night.

<sup>83</sup> Zeiger, N. (2021) Interview with author, 18 Nov.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. Both Zeiger and Parr came from theatre backgrounds; Parr's links to the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh were vital in persuading stage dramatist Graham Reid to work for TV, which he was sceptical about.

in the Traffic, *Ruby in the Rain* (1981) (*Iris*), which Zeiger claims BBC NI were not given the financial means to make.<sup>85</sup>

In addition, at least nine more England-set PFTs mention or feature brief sequences concerning the Troubles, including David Edgar and Robert Holman's PFTs which include English soldiers' deaths (see Chapter 2).<sup>86</sup> PFT's Northern Ireland-centric output was consistently sceptical of grand, mythical narratives and consciously aimed to portray human-centric stories of life in the 'Six Counties', being deeply critical of sectarianism on both sides.

Of Northern Ireland-set PFTs, four were contemporary-set: *The Dandelion Clock* (1975), *Catchpenny Twist*, *The Last Window Cleaner* (1979) and *Iris*. While Stewart Parker and Ron Hutchinson's PFTs adhered to the customary dramatic representation of Northern Ireland by featuring the Troubles, they gleefully subverted Richard Hoggart's preference for Northern Ireland dramas with a serious tone. Hoggart's survey of 1968-80 dramas omits *Catchpenny Twist* entirely while perceiving *The Last Window Cleaner* as frivolously using 'anecdote as a refuge'.<sup>87</sup> While most viewers shared Hoggart's bafflement, Ron Hutchinson's Swiftian satire was well-received by all four of its London critics, for exposing Belfast's unconscious via a 'witty surrealism' analogised to *M\*A\*S\*H\** (1972-83) and *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (1969-74), while Rob Ritchie acclaims its 'comic brio' as unique.<sup>88</sup> Hoggart also ignores Joyce Neary's earlier PFT *Taking Leave* (1974), which has a mordant humour: British Army Sergeant Mike (George Sweeney) sees returning to active service in Belfast as preferable to his dysfunctional family life in the London suburbs.

Using John Hill's term, the 'ludic' Stewart Parker escapes the straitjacket of grimness associated with Northern Ireland fictions and both his PFTs set there atypically centre on women.<sup>89</sup> In a Dublin pub in *Catchpenny Twist*, when Belfast teacher-turned-singer Monagh (Frances Tomelty) argues with bar-lady Mrs Barker (Pat Leavy) concerning the prospect of a united Ireland, they competitively try to out-Irish each other. Later, Marie (Maggie Shevlin) asserts Irish anti-imperialist grievances against the British to songwriters

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> A further two are set in the Republic of Ireland, including Colin Welland's *Your Man*.

<sup>87</sup> Hoggart (1980) op. cit. 261-262.

<sup>88</sup> BBC ARD (1979) Audience Research Report – Play for Today: *The Last Window Cleaner*, 6 Mar, VR/79/81; Wheeler, D. (1979) Dramatic truths, *Listener*, 22 Feb, 288; Murray, J. (1979b) English, Irish and Rubbish, *Daily Express*, 14 Feb, 23; Last, R. (1979) Irish impossibility well managed, *Daily Telegraph*, 14 Feb, 15; Ritchie op. cit. 3.

<sup>89</sup> Hill, J. (2022) Play for Today and Northern Ireland in the 1970s, *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, (19)2, 234.

Roy Fletcher (Gerard Murphy) and Martyn Semple (Sam Dale). Parker makes Marie's language direct, impassioned and eloquent; her commitment is ambivalently presented as preferable to Fletcher and Semple's detached, apolitical outlook. The macabre humour of the play's ending – where Fletcher and Semple are embroiled in an airport bombing – sends up their naivety and asserts the inescapability of politics. The play ends on a freeze-frame of Fletcher and Semple jumping as the bomb explodes; over the end-credits, Monagh has the last word, expressing her sexual desire when singing the rock song 'Steeplejack'.

The mid-1970s-set *Shadows* depicts deep prejudice in Derry; again, both sides are culpable: for instance, 11-year-old Joe's (MacRea Clarke) schoolteacher is cruelly anti-Irish, while Joe's often drunken Dad (Joe McPartland) is vehemently anti-English and anti-Protestant. Likewise, director Jim O'Brien foregrounds real graffiti endorsing the 'IRA' and the 'PROVOS', and that proclaims: 'YOU ARE NOW ENTERING FREE DERRY', establishing the verisimilitude of this Catholic-majority city. This prefigures a visceral sequence of British soldiers searching houses in Joe's Catholic district; an exploration that is narratively shown to be justifiable, if enacted in an overly intimidating manner. Joe establishes a friendship with the personable teacher Kathleen (Lise-Ann McLaughlin). Her pronouncement that 'Ireland is my country' is cruelly undermined when she is beaten up by zealous Irish nationalist men for going out with an English soldier. This accords with a wider PFT master-plot: toxic masculinity universally cuts across sectarian divides.<sup>90</sup> Mahon's drama may be narrowly focused, as John Hill argues, but its climax presents Joe as newly aware of his violent environment, while not foreclosing his potential literary future – as emphasised by Kathleen's parting gift of *The Oxford Book of Irish Verse*.<sup>91</sup>

*The Legion Hall Bombing* (1978) dramatises verbatim court transcripts from the Diplock Court trial at the Belfast City Commission in September 1976 of Willie Gallagher, who had confessed to the bombing of the British Legion Hall in Strabane and was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment. Informed by the BBC's ethos of 'balance', Head of Plays James Cellan-Jones intervened to excise its polemical ending, causing writer Caryl Churchill and director Roland Joffé to remove their names from the credits. This 'undisguised political censorship' was accompanied by its being shown in a later 10:25pm time slot, while a

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<sup>90</sup> Conversely, Wilson John Haire's *The Dandelion Clock* depicted the tangible physical threat of teenage girl gangs in Loyalist Belfast areas. This followed the disturbing real-life 'romper-room' murder of Anne Ogilby by UDA women in Sandy Row in July 1974.

<sup>91</sup> Hill (2017) op. cit. 77.

planned *Tonight* discussion was scrapped.<sup>92</sup> Cellan-Jones claims the epilogue ‘was violently anti-British and used the term “Freedom Fighter” for the IRA’, and that his decision ensured that the final play was ‘quite hard hitting but fair’.<sup>93</sup> The liberal humanist Cellan-Jones argues that Churchill’s editorial epilogue was an excessively subjective addition to a verbatim drama which enabled viewers to arrive at their own conclusions about this jury-less trial: indeed, the Judge’s (David Kelly) words and actions indict him. He defers unduly to the police and convicts the First Accused (Robert Kavanagh) based on clearly inadequate evidence, without questioning the methods by which his confession was extracted.

The majority of dramatists employed on Northern Ireland-set PFTs were Protestants. Stewart Parker, Maurice Leitch and Graham Reid were a group unified in their opposition to middle-class Ulster Unionist Protestant elites, having more instinctive empathy with Loyalists, due to their working-class backgrounds. This group also included Derek Mahon, whose two PFTs were adapted from prose sources by writers who transcended the religious divide, shared a universalist humanism and lack of dogma, with cosmopolitan socialist Parker having the clearest political stance.<sup>94</sup> This group’s Northern Ireland-set PFTs invariably dissect their own identities and communities critically and knowledgeably.

East Belfast-born Parker was especially influenced by the aforementioned Wednesday Play dramatist Sam Thompson, who had stood unsuccessfully for election in Belfast for the Northern Ireland Labour Party and whose non-sectarian socialism Parker admired.

Thompson, like Parker, died prematurely; Parker saw him as ‘a sane and compassionate leader for the Protestant working class’.<sup>95</sup> Parker fundamentally valued reason and art over the mythologising of violence he perceived in both Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland and his work is ‘committed to a life-affirming humanism’.<sup>96</sup> Jennifer Johnston describes Parker’s ‘enormous generosity’ as a man and the ‘generous spirit’ of his plays.<sup>97</sup> John Montague, the Catholic author of *The Cry*, had, from 1970, taken part in

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<sup>92</sup> Braun, E. (2014) ‘What Truth is There in this Story?’: The Dramatisation of Northern Ireland, in: J. Bignell & S. Lacey (eds.) *British Television Drama: Past, Present and Future*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 174-175.

<sup>93</sup> Cellan-Jones, J. (2006) *Forsythe and Hindsight or Screen Directing for Pleasure and Profit: The Memoirs of James Cellan-Jones*. Dudley: Kaleidoscope Publishing, 74.

<sup>94</sup> Rob Ritchie names Bill Morrison in his grouping of Northern Irish writers who were now based in Britain, who he claims have much in common with David Rudkin: Ritchie op. cit. 4.

<sup>95</sup> Parr, C. (2017) *Inventing the Myth: Political Passions and the Ulster Protestant Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 101.

<sup>96</sup> Wallace, C. (ed.) (2013) *Stewart Parker Television Plays*. Prague: Litteratia Pragensia [Kindle], 2-3.

<sup>97</sup> Johnston interviewed in: *Inside Ulster* (1989) [online] **BBC Rewind**, Available at: <https://bbcrewind.co.uk/asset/5ea00c5a9cf8e100275679ca?q=%22stewart%20parker%22> [accessed: 27/07/2022].

the 'Planter and the Gael' tours with his fellow poet the Protestant John Hewitt, who Conal Parr regards as having an 'enlightened' Unionist identity, to try and break down sectarian boundaries.<sup>98</sup>

Both Parker and Graham Reid intensely valued the civic and educational commitment of the Protestant working-class in Belfast they had experienced while growing up. In 1984, Reid, who was born in South Belfast's Donegall Road area, lamented the decline of its civic spirit, asking, in response to old neighbours' claims that he has 'put Coolderry Street on the map': 'do they see what I see, hear what I hear, when I watch my "Plays for Today"... that are all about yesterday?'<sup>99</sup> Actor Kenneth Branagh stated that Reid's Billy trilogy symbolised the 'end of a kind of working class life' which valued education and acted as a restraining, moderate influence within Belfast's working-class Protestant community.<sup>100</sup> Reid's plays depict the Martin family experiencing unemployment, alcoholism, domestic violence and death within their Belfast terraced home.

*Too Late to Talk to Billy* (1982) (hereafter *TLTTTB*) opens with shots of boarded-up shop windows, followed by myriad references to declining religious faith among Belfast Protestants: for Reid, a less concerning development than wider civic decline. The trilogy was primarily shot by director Paul Seed in BBC Northern Ireland's studios, but includes excursions to real locations, including hospital, pub and the network of South Belfast terraces. Norman (James Ellis) refers to unemployment as an issue in the Catholic Ardoyne area; however, Reid's trilogy shows joblessness affecting male Protestants like the titular Billy (Kenneth Branagh). Worker Norman self-righteously claims, 'The dole won't keep a home', before perpetrating domestic violence against his daughter Lorna (Bríd Brennan), with grim situational irony. Billy struggles to avoid following his father's example: resorting, in the early plays, to heavy drinking and violence, if outside the home.

Throughout the trilogy, Lorna and the two children Ann (Tracey Lynch) and Maureen (Ainé Gorman) form an irreverent Greek Chorus commenting on events with working-class gallows humour, becoming increasingly central in the third play (this Chapter's case-study). Reid subtly critiques social class snobbery and nativist sectarianism. In *A Matter of Choice for Billy* (1983), Ann recounts being called a 'guttersnipe' by her school headmaster Cyril Watson (Nigel Anthony). Recalling representations of Derry in *Shadows*, we see Protestant 'UDA' graffiti on a real Belfast street wall that Seed captures on film.

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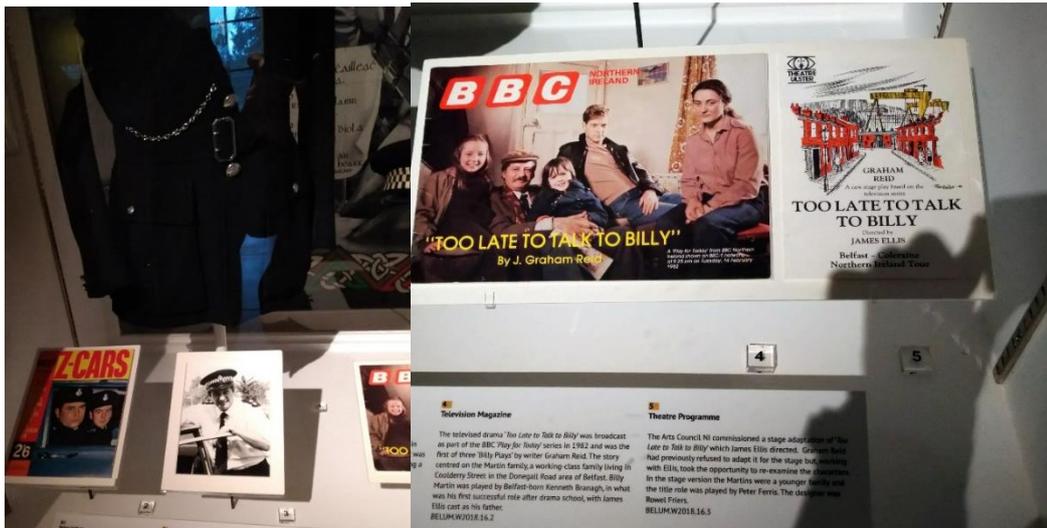
<sup>98</sup> Parr op. cit. 94.

<sup>99</sup> Reid, G. (1984a) Growing up in the cradle of the cherry-picker, *Fortnight*, Mar, 30.

<sup>100</sup> Mulvenna, G. (2012) The Protestant working class in Belfast: education and civic erosion – an alternative analysis, *Irish Studies Review*, (20)4, 435.

Throughout the trilogy, Ian (Colum Convey) is involved with a Loyalist paramilitary group.

The Billy trilogy's success with Northern Irish audiences is clear in how they are the *only* BBC Northern Ireland-made PFTs to be repeated, while a BBC Northern Ireland promotional still representing *TLTTTB* features as an exhibit in the Ulster Museum in Belfast (see Figure 4.1).



Figures 4.1-4.2. Photos taken by author at the Ulster Museum, 25/01/2020.

The Museum's caption text explains that Reid's trilogy 'centred on [...] a working-class family living in Coolderry Street in the Donegall Road area of Belfast'. Exhibited to the right is a poster for Reid's later theatre production which involved actor James Ellis; to the left is a publicity still of Ellis as policeman Bert Lynch in *Z Cars* and, above this, Lynch's uniform costume. The caption describes Ellis as 'one of the first actors to bring a Northern Irish accent to mainstream television drama', which emphasises how crucial the North of England-set *Z Cars* is within the DNA of devolved British TV drama, especially given David Rose's involvement as producer.

*TLTTTB* followed *Iris*, which had shown a strong public taste for localised non-metropolitan drama.<sup>101</sup> Director Paul Seed emphasises how the Billy trilogy evaded clichéd, doom-laden televisual representations of the six counties: 'The people of Northern Ireland were really chuffed that we did something that was about the Troubles only in a

<sup>101</sup> *Iris* gained 6.8 million viewers UK-wide, where its ITV competition, including *Brideshead Revisited* had an 8.1% higher audience share, but 12.1% more Ulster viewers watched *Iris*: BARB (1981) Viewing Summary, 24 Nov. Another PFT with 'local appeal' to viewers in its region of setting was *United Kingdom*, whose North East England audience was 13% of the population, more than twice the proportions who watched in the South and South West, 5 and 6%: BARB (1981) Network Report, 8 Dec.

background way. It was basically a drama about people living their lives and a family living in recognisable streets and they felt respected'.<sup>102</sup>

Reid and Parker's secularism found echoes in historical PFTs: Maurice Leitch's *Gates of Gold* (1983), set in rural County Antrim, and *The Cry* (1984), also set in 1959. Leitch, an acclaimed Northern Irish novelist, incisively critiques both 'low church' Evangelical Protestantism associated with the working-class and 'high church' Anglican Protestantism linked with the Ulster Unionist middle-classes. Leitch signifies the former as lachrymose and sexually exploitative; the latter as stultifying, deathly and repressive. Both are portrayed as manipulating local people malignly. Evangelical Pastor Kells (Peter Bayliss) drinks whisky in his caravan while posing a threat to the 14 year-old Grace (Helen McClenaghan), who has learning difficulties. While there are exceptions, drinking in PFT's Northern Ireland corpus is more often conducted in private abodes, unlike Scottish PFTs, where the pub is central.

PFT's Northern Irish and Irish writers are united in being cultural outsiders, with plural identities. Novelist, playwright and master of the short-story William Trevor has been compared to fellow Irish Protestant writers George Bernard Shaw and Jonathan Swift in his perceptiveness regarding the bizarre, cruel and evil sides of human nature.<sup>103</sup> While Trevor increasingly communicated his Irishness later in his life, Peter Porter sees him as especially skilled at observing English life: which Trevor did in his four Southern England-set PFTs (1971-74).<sup>104</sup> While David Rudkin was born in London, his parents were Northern Irish Protestants, 'very strict evangelical Christians who considered all theatre – except Shakespeare – the Scarlet Woman'.<sup>105</sup> Rudkin wrote his radio play *Cries from Casement as his Bones are Brought to Dublin* (1973), featuring Norman Rodway as Roger Casement, to give 'utterance to my Northern Irish Protestant identity as opposed to my English one' and 'my [...] personal identification with the Irish journey Casement travels'.<sup>106</sup> Rudkin's PFT *Penda's Fen* articulated the writer's anti-conservative perspective of valuing individual growth through plural identities that are 'nothing pure' (see Chapter 5). Jennifer Johnston, whose novel *Shadows on our Skin* (1977) was adapted by Derek Mahon for PFT (1980),

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<sup>102</sup> Seed, P. (2020) Interview with author, 23 Jul.

<sup>103</sup> Porter, P. (2016) William Trevor obituary, *Guardian*, 21 Nov [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/nov/21/william-trevor-obituary> [accessed: 26/01/2022].

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Taylor, J.R. (1968) *Anger and After: a guide to the new British drama*. Harmondsworth: Pelican, 279.

<sup>106</sup> Rudkin, D. (1974) *Cries from Casement as his Bones are Brought to Dublin*. London: British Broadcasting Corporation, front flap.

was an Irish Anglican Protestant who felt strongly Irish and was critical of the Anglo-Irish Protestant Ascendancy.<sup>107</sup>

PfT did not neglect Catholic voices, as Deana Rankin implied when discussing Reid's Billy trilogy, claiming that 'No equivalent non-documentary, fictional drama about Catholic life in the North ever found its way to the screen'.<sup>108</sup> While Northern Irish Protestant settings and voices *were* featured more, several Catholic writers wrote PfTs. These included works by Irish Catholics John Montague and Dominic Behan – the former's 1964 short story 'The Cry' was adapted by Derek Mahon (1984).<sup>109</sup> Like the Protestant Belfast dramatists, these writers conveyed deep insights into their own communities, including intense criticism of violent espousers of the Republican cause, while often advancing a non-sectarian socialism. For instance, Dominic Behan's *Carson Country*, an informative Brechtian history play concerning Tory politician Sir Edward Carson's impact on Northern Irish politics in 1912, is even-handed in its portrayal of the malign violence perpetrated by both sides. Through the figure of Archie Heron (Denys Hawthorne), Behan asserts that socialism is the necessary progressive force to transcend the Catholic-Protestant divide; Heron's Catholic Republican background lends his criticisms of his own 'side' greater force.

*The Cry* is set in Catholic County Tyrone in 1959 and features Peter Douglas (Adrian Dunbar), born in the area, but now a successful journalist in London. On his return, Douglas hears the titular cry from out on his street, resulting from a nocturnal sectarian attack by the Protestant B-Specials on the Catholic Michael Ferguson (Breffni McKenna). Douglas, a liberal idealist, wants justice, but finds the Protestant RUC obstructive and Catholics too scared to speak out, as unlike him, they will have to live with the consequences. The production of *The Cry* was itself affected by sectarianism: as Seán Day-Lewis explains, the planned shoot in County Antrim was made impossible by the hostility of Protestant locals, and was moved to a nearby Catholic village.<sup>110</sup> This is corroborated by a contemporary news report showing Alderman George Herron, a former B-Special,

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<sup>107</sup> Leavy, A. (2017) In Praise of Jennifer Johnston, *Irish Times*, 14 Jun [online] Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/in-praise-of-jennifer-johnston-1.2168695> [accessed: 26/01/2022].

<sup>108</sup> Rankin, D. (2001) Dialogues with the past, *Times Literary Supplement*, 29 Jun, 20.

<sup>109</sup> Others were English Catholic Mary O'Malley, whose parents had Irish and Lithuanian roots and Scottish Catholic Marcella Evaristi, whose parents were Italian and Jewish. PfT enabled such cosmopolitan writers to reach very large audiences.

<sup>110</sup> Day-Lewis, S. (1984c) Stunted lives, *Daily Telegraph*, 1 Aug, 15.

disrupting filming in Straid due to his perception that the drama was inaccurate in presenting the B-Specials as violent and as parading with an Alsatian dog.<sup>111</sup>

The play's text, via the Catholic Montague and his Ulster Protestant adapter Mahon, criticises both sides. Peter's Catholic dad Mr Douglas (Michael Duffy) possesses an ingrained vengefulness as blinkered and damaging as other Catholic Republican characters in *Your Man* and *Shadows*. However, we also hear Adrian Dunbar's voice-over reading from Peter's planned article:

One must distinguish between a familiar English bobby and the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The Ulster police are the only ordinary police in these islands to carry revolvers... In times of emergency, they are also armed with Sten guns. In addition to the RUC, there are the B-Specials. More than 13,000 over-armed and under-trained auxiliaries, drawn exclusively from the ranks of the Protestant majority. In fact, you have all the elements of a police state, not in Spain or South Africa, but in the British Isles... Such measures do not prevent political disease, they are symptoms of it.

Dunbar emphatically communicates Mahon and Montague's truth-telling concerning the pre-history of the British Army's arrival in Northern Ireland following the August 1969 riots. *The Cry* ends with Peter Duncan's failure to finish his article, then there is temporal jump forward nine years as, over the end-credits, director Chris Menaul uses an actual BBC news report from 6 October 1968. This concerns the Duke Street civil rights march by Catholics, calling for 'One Man, One Vote' and an end to housing discrimination, which takes place, according to newsreader Martin Muncaster, in 'Londonderry'. Muncaster describes arrests and injuries and quotes the marcher and democratic socialist SDLP MP Gerry Fitt on having never before witnessed such 'police brutality'. Defying expectations of Troubles drama fatigue, *The Cry* was universally praised by London critics: Herbert Kretzmer extolled 'a drama without heroes', while Hugh Hebert analogised its story perceptively to the 1984-85 Miners' Strike: 'There are divided towns in Nottinghamshire'.<sup>112</sup>

#### 4.3.4. The North of England

The majority of the UK's population in 1971-81 lived in England: 83%. The population of South East England, including East Anglia and Greater London, averaged 33.9%. This area was over-represented by PFT with an estimated 48.5% set there. PFT's focus on London is

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<sup>111</sup> *Scene Around Six* (1983) [online] **BBC Rewind**, Available at: <https://bbcrewind.co.uk/asset/5df8f58527d61300272abe1f?q=%22PLAY%20FOR%20TODAY%22> [accessed: 27/07/2022]. Herron criticises the BBC as duplicitous for telling Straid's villagers that it was a 'love' story. Producer Andrée Molyneux emphasises that the production is fair to both sides, and also its status as fictional drama, not news.

<sup>112</sup> Kretzmer, H. (1984e) No wonder Irish eyes are crying, *Daily Mail*, 1 Aug, 27; Hebert, H. (1984c) *The Cry*, *Guardian*, 1 Aug, 11.

even more extensive: 12.8% of the UK's population lived in Greater London, but over a third of PFTs were set there (see Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1. PFT's settings by region and nation**

<b>Nation or Region</b>	<b>Mean average population (1971 &amp; 1981 censuses) (&amp; as % of UK total)</b>	<b>No. of PFTs set here (&amp; as % of total PFTs)</b>	<b>People per PFT</b>
North East and Cumbria	3,135,000 (5.59%)	4 (1.36%)	783,750
North West	6,457,000 (11.51%)	25 (8.50%)	258,280
Yorkshire and Humberside	4,910,000 (8.76%)	24 (8.16%)	204,583
<b>NORTH TOTAL</b>	<b>14,592,000 (26.02%)</b>	<b>53 (18.03%)</b>	<b>275,321</b>
East Midlands	3,752,500 (6.69%)	12.5 (4.25%)	300,200
West Midlands	5,166,000 (9.21%)	12 (4.08%)	430,500
<b>MIDLANDS TOTAL</b>	<b>8,918,500 (15.90%)</b>	<b>24.5 (8.33%)</b>	<b>364,020</b>
East Anglia	1,791,500 (3.19%)	3 (1.02%)	597,167
Greater London	7,167,500 (12.78%)	103 (35.03%)	69,587
South East	9,900,500 (17.65%)	37.5 (12.76%)	264,013
South West	4,246,500 (7.57%)	12 (4.08%)	353,875
<b>SOUTH TOTAL</b>	<b>23,106,000 (41.20%)</b>	<b>155.5 (52.89%)</b>	<b>148,592</b>
<b>ENGLAND TOTAL</b>	<b>46,616,500 (83.13%)</b>	<b>240 (81.63%)</b>	<b>200,070</b>

<b>NORTHERN IRELAND</b>	<b>1,523,033</b> <b>(2.72%)</b>	<b>12</b> <b>(4.08%)</b>	<b>126,919</b>
<b>SCOTLAND</b>	<b>5,179,000</b> <b>(9.24%)</b>	<b>21</b> <b>(7.14%)</b>	<b>246,619</b>
<b>WALES</b>	<b>2,760,500</b> <b>(4.92%)</b>	<b>5</b> <b>(1.70%)</b>	<b>552,100</b>
<b>UNITED KINGDOM<sup>113</sup></b>	<b>56,078,533</b>	<b>278</b> <b>(94.56%)</b>	<b>201,721</b>

South West England, with 7.6% of the UK population, is somewhat under-represented; PFTs set there included Charles Wood and Peter Nichols's Bristol suburbs-set plays, while *Stocker's Copper* (1972), *Nuts in May* (1976), *Blue Remembered Hills* (1979) and *Jessie* (1980) are set in Cornwall, Dorset, Gloucestershire and Devon, respectively. 16% of the UK lived in the Midlands. While a total of 39 PFTs were commissioned and produced by Pebble Mill's English Regions Drama (ERD) at BBC Birmingham, these plays' settings were geographically dispersed: the aforementioned *Nuts in May*, two David Hare dramas set in Surrey and London respectively; plus, several more were set in the Midlands, the North West and Yorkshire and Humberside. Marking a spatial retrenchment, two of BBC Birmingham's final three PFTs – *Reluctant Chickens* (1983) and *The Groundling and the Kite* (1984) – were set in London.

The North of England's 1971-81 population averaged 26.3%, comprising the North West (11.8%), Yorkshire and Humberside (8.8%) and the North East and Cumbria (5.7%). The latter region was notably under-represented: no PFTs were primarily set in Cumbria, while three were filmed in the North East: *The Happy Hunting Ground*, *Chance of a Lifetime* (1980) and *United Kingdom* (1981), though these were made by London-based producers Anne Head, Richard Eyre and Kenith Trodd, respectively.

However, at least 21.5 PFTs were primarily set in Yorkshire and Humberside – five commissioned and made from Birmingham, 16.5 from London. Yorkshire was thus quite fairly represented in relation to its population size (see Table 4.1).<sup>114</sup> West Yorkshire

<sup>113</sup> All italicised figures given are projected estimates extrapolated from my dataset: wherein I identified definite or probable locations for 232 PFTs. In addition to the PFT texts themselves, this data draws on production paperwork, interviewees' memories and hermeneutic guesswork. An estimated 16 PFTs are non-UK-set, while a projected seven are set in institutions like public-schools or prisons, which mostly seem likely to be set in Southern England but are omitted from the South figure in Table 4.1.

<sup>114</sup> The half is for *Three for the Fancy* (1974), which starts in the West – Art, Abe and Ern are seen in their Leeds familial environment – before shifting to Doncaster, South Yorkshire for the show they enter their pets in.

featured especially regularly – in 11 PFTs – peaking at one-and-a-half per series from 1972-77. Five were set in North Yorkshire, four-and-a-half in South Yorkshire and just one in East Yorkshire and Humberside. At least six more PFTs included Yorkshire characters transplanted to other regions, like the troubled, upwardly-mobile protagonists in David Mercer's *The Bankrupt* (1972) and Richard Eyre's adaptation of David Storey's *Pasmore* (1980), and the Sheffield-born Frank (Mick Ford) in John McGrath's two-part *The Adventures of Frank* (1980). Alan Bennett's *Sunset Across the Bay* (1975) features a Leeds couple retiring to Morecambe, Lancashire.

Bennett's is one of at least 24 PFTs identified as being set in North West England; which, like Scotland, is *slightly* under-represented according to UK population data. Nine of these were made by BBC Birmingham, 15 by London, showing Pebble Mill's preference for the North West over the North East. There is a reasonable intra-regional spread of representations: six-and-a-half in Greater Manchester, eight in Merseyside, six in Lancashire and two-and-a-half in Cheshire, the latter including *Young Shoulders* (1984), largely set in Lisbon, Portugal, but which starts and ends in suburban Cheshire.<sup>115</sup>

It is necessary to qualify and historicise the simplistic impression that PFT had a Southern bias. While the strand did neglect Chester, Middlesbrough, Preston, Sunderland and York, it also overlooked Cambridge, Ipswich, Norwich, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Reading, Swindon and, barring one scene, Southampton.<sup>116</sup> With a few exceptions, PFT ignored the East Coast north of Kent. There was a steady rise in PFTs set in the North of England during the strand's first era (1970-73), led by Irene Shubik and Graeme McDonald, averaging 18.2%. The increase in 1972-73 coincided with David Rose's ERD starting, but also reflected London-based producers Tony Garnett and McDonald opting for Northern settings. In the second era (1973-77), led by producers McDonald, Rose and Trodd, 20.2% of PFTs were set in the North of England – reaching a third in series 5 (1974-75), the strand's Northern representational zenith. However, in PFT's Matheson-Eyre-Trodd era (1977-82), this declined to 14.3%; while in the final era (1982-84), marked by a diminution of producer power, a mere 4.7% were set in the North of England.

A PFT from the strand's Northern-centric pinnacle is Barry Collins's *The Lonely Man's Lover* (1974) (hereafter *TLML*), which opens in a West Riding town with attentive locals enjoying a historical street theatre play performed by members of Calder High School, led by a fringe theatre group which resembles John Fox's Welfare State. Spectators'

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<sup>115</sup> *Funny Farm* (1975) is counted as it contains North West accents, but I cannot yet situate it more precisely.

<sup>116</sup> *Chance of a Lifetime* includes references to Middlesbrough and the football team, and *United Kingdom* contains location work at Basil Spence's Sunderland Civic Centre building.

merriment is contrasted by one bystander's sour, insular reminiscences in voice-over about how he, his father and his father before him used to play St George here, but it's 'not for the likes of us no more. It's dead for us', now being taken over by schoolkids, incoming teachers and TV people. As the performance ends, a few spectators put coins in a performer's hat, while many file off into that crucial PFT focal point, the public house. Previous shots of the carnivalesque play and its audience in the Hebden Bridge location were juxtaposed with people drinking in the pub, served by a Barmaid (Pat Wallis). Wallis would have been familiar to viewers from *Kisses at Fifty* (1973) (*KAF*) and appeared in five PFTs (1973-82), three of which she performed behind the bar.

Compared with Scottish representations, slightly fewer North of England-set PFTs feature pub scenes, drinking or mentions of alcohol, but a still high 73% do. All three North East PFTs do, while North West PFTs foreground drinking less – 62.5%. In the Merseyside-set modernist melodrama *The Bouncing Boy* (1972), Dave Osmond (Norman Eshley) is a ruthless, socially aspirational businessman; his materialist, jet-set dreams are captured in a dream sequence. Unlike most PFT male protagonists, second-hand car dealer Dave perceives himself as above pubs, being so busy swindling people that he almost misses his daughter's birth – and who expresses anger, having wanted a son. More typical is the West Yorkshire-set *KAF* whose pub is the warm, yet spiky fulcrum of a working-class community. Like all of Colin Welland's dramas, *KAF* emerged from Welland's immersive research within the communities he was writing about (see Chapter 3).<sup>117</sup> *KAF* and Trevor Griffiths's *Comedians* (1979) echo the historian Raphael Samuel's perception of the insularity of Northerners in such places and how their surface warmth sometimes masks exclusionary attitudes.<sup>118</sup>

Paul Madden and David Wilson discern Welland's 'communal touch' and his unrivalled ability to fairly and vividly represent the conflicts between spatially-rooted groups and dissenting individuals via a robust, heightened realism which they analogise to Dickens, describing Welland as a recorder of the North of England's 'bawdiness and exuberance and viciousness'.<sup>119</sup> Welland explains that pubs and clubs figure so often in his plays as they are 'such an integral part of the sort of people I like', and are the places where 'people are most forthcoming'.<sup>120</sup> Like the Rovers Return in *Coronation Street*, pubs facilitate

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<sup>117</sup> Trodd, K. (2020) Interview with author, 22 Oct.

<sup>118</sup> Samuel, R. (1999) *Island Stories: Unravelling Britain – Theatres of Memory, Volume II*. London: Verso, 166.

<sup>119</sup> Madden, P. & Wilson, D. (1975) The Communal Touch: The Television Plays of Colin Welland, *Sight and Sound*, Spring, 116-117.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.* 117.

frank talk: Harry's (Bill Maynard) fiery daughter Sandra (Lori Wells) expresses her anger at her dad's adultery most vehemently within the pub environment.<sup>121</sup> Welland's collaborative practice is evident in how 14-year-old actor Joseph Reynolds was allowed to change dialogue in *Your Man* to ensure its Belfast authenticity.<sup>122</sup>

PfT regularly included comedic performers who epitomised the strand's regional and class diversity. Jeff Nuttall and Rodick Carmichael characterise working-class 'Us' humour, or 'survival humour' as embracing life and emerging from the gut, while witty upper- or middle-class 'me' humour embraces death and centres on the mind.<sup>123</sup> PfT producers and directors Graeme McDonald, Ken Loach, Pharic Maclaren, Stephen Frears, John Mackenzie, David Rose, Tony Garnett, Roland Joffé, Richard Eyre and Tara Prem took the lead in employing pub or variety performers and club comedians from across the UK, like Queenie Watts, Duggie Brown, Johnny Allan, John Grieve, Paul Shane, Billy Connolly, Bobby Knutt, Rita May, Mick Miller, Gertie Almond, Jimmy Jewel, Terry Pearson and Johnny Leeze.<sup>124</sup> PfT's embrace of an Us humour which is *of* the crowd but which incorporates witty criticism *of* the crowd is evidenced by its repeated inclusion of Billy Connolly, who Nuttall and Carmichael value for his awareness that 'the living can spit in the face of devitalisation'.<sup>125</sup>

In contrast to Leon Hunt's perception of an androcentric working-class culture represented on TV where men enjoy 'laffs' which exclude, Jim Allen's *The Spongers* (1978) emphasises women performing on stage, making 'vulgar populism' their own.<sup>126</sup> During a music-hall turn in the Middleton social club, Gert (Gertie Almond) asks the girls whether they agree that 'this world is in a mess', receiving a loud 'YES!' Gert declares that men are to blame, eliciting an even louder cheer. She tells a male heckler, 'Shut it, you're outnumbered!' and immediately performs a version of 'Are You Lonesome Tonight?' dedicated just to the ladies, that expresses their shared, self-deprecating survival humour.

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<sup>121</sup> See my analysis of Welland's *KAF* and its reception: May, T. (2020d) Play for Today: Kisses at Fifty, **Forgotten Television Drama**, 17 Nov [online] Available at: <https://forgottentelevisiondrama.wordpress.com/2020/11/17/play-for-today-kisses-at-fifty/> [accessed: 27/02/2022].

<sup>122</sup> Reynolds interviewed in: *Scene Around Six* (1976) [online] **BBC Rewind**, Available at: <https://bbcrewind.co.uk/asset/5c0ffceec87482002130f21c?q=%22colin%20welland%22> [accessed: 27/07/2022].

<sup>123</sup> Nuttall, J. & Carmichael, R. (1977) *Common Factors/Vulgar Factions*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 23-24.

<sup>124</sup> These performers are listed in order of their first PfT appearances; Maclaren had first cast Grieve in Edward Boyd's TWP *A Black Candle for Mrs Gogarty* (1967).

<sup>125</sup> Nuttall & Carmichael op. cit. 10.

<sup>126</sup> Hunt, L. (1998) *British Low Culture: From Safari Suits to Sexploitation*. London: Routledge, 41. Paul Willis analyses the cultural pull of 'having a laff': Willis, P. (1977) *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*. Farnborough: Saxon House.

Alongside such feelings concerning gender, PFT could reveal regional Us and Them attitudes. According to Assistant Floor Manager Jacmel Dent, her Northern relatives in the Wirral enjoyed *The Adventures of Frank*'s blunt, jaundiced portrayal of greedy, grasping Londoners.<sup>127</sup> There is a similarly abrasive attitude behind Liverpool playwright Alan Bleasdale's PFTs. Bleasdale's 'survival humour' is ebulliently anarchic in *Scully's New Year's Eve* (1978) and *The Muscle Market* (1981). Via copious allusions to Hollywood cinema, which appealed to large audiences, Bleasdale followed Philip Martin's *Gangsters* (1975) in its freewheeling populism. Like Alan Plater and Willy Russell, Bleasdale deploys a particular localised wit to communicate a wider 'Us' humour at the expense of the stuffy middle-class world *and* working-class 'respectable' attitudes, while avoiding judging characters who adapt to Thatcherite economic policies through criminal means. In *The Muscle Market*, the harassed, hapless business owner Duggan (Pete Postlethwaite) delivers a searing, uninterrupted monologue which skewers cushioned middle-class naivety and extols how Liverpoolians adapt, often desperately, to survive in a harsh environment (54:06-55:31):

Every big firm in this country started out by some grabbing bastard, hustling and lying and thieving because that's the only way to get up there! But it doesn't matter, and you know why? Cos when you get up there, there's more robbing goes on in Park Lane and friggin' Mayfair and tax havens and computers and the likes than in site huts and wellies and farting little offices like this. [Inspector tries to interrupt] Just shut it! I'll tell you something else for free. Do you know what people 're really creatin' their pants about, eh? When they see it on the news and in the papers, you know, like the bravery, the balls and guts and blood, we'll fight them on the beaches, what made this country great... I've got that, I was brought up to have all that, because where I come from, the meek shall inherit a kick in the plums, that's all. And... What I'm saying is, *all* I'm saying is... I've got what it takes to live out there, and you pair o' pen-pushers [...] you don't even get out the starting blocks. Go on, get out of it!

Duggan emphasises that the powerful have cheated to gain power, and thus cannot credibly moralise about those with fewer advantages who break rules to survive. Bleasdale angrily channels the anarchic 'Us' against 'Them' spirit of the Liverpool working-class: people he presents as having no choice but to become atomised survivors.

More overtly collective are the striking women workers in *Leeds United!* (1974), who express their uncompromising 'Us' humour when advancing their righteous case angrily as a crowd.<sup>128</sup> Welland conveys the facts of a real-life dispute, which he had researched in Leeds alongside producer Kenith Trodd and director Roy Battersby, which the cast enact

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<sup>127</sup> Dent, J. (2021a) Interview with author, 28 Jun.

<sup>128</sup> An article previewing the PFT by journalist Gordon Burn shows how media 'balance' was different in 1974; Burn interviewed a worker, an employer and a trade-unionist. While not giving worker Winnie Shutt quite the proportionate prominence as Welland's drama gives the workers, Burn gives her more space than the trade-unionist: Burn, G. (1974) United they stood, *Radio Times*, 24 Oct, 9, 11.

with persuasive force via impassioned performances, including Mollie (Lynne Perrie) and the ferociously sharp-tongued Sadie (Lori Wells).<sup>129</sup> Rarely among PFTs, there were claims that *Leeds United!* had a direct impact: Welland was delighted that its ‘rawness’ had inspired strikes in Northern textiles factories from Doncaster to Darlington.<sup>130</sup>

While they may not didactically condemn domestic violence, Northern PFT’s representations of such ethically reprehensible acts do not endorse them either, but are part of their realistic storytelling (see Chapter 5’s analyses of representations of racism, sexism and homophobia in public spaces). PFT’s archival representations which seem neutral, or implicitly critical, regarding such social evils may invariably be perceived by viewers today as cautionary tales, and as necessary counterweights to pervasive 1970s nostalgia. The characters in *Keep an Eye on Albert* (1975) and *Spend, Spend, Spend* (1977) are either trapped or stoically accepting of their limited situations: both Glenda (Susan Tracy) and Vivian Nicholson (Susan Littler) suffer domestic violence from men but do not challenge it. Contrarily, conveying an emergent social consciousness, Jim Allen’s *United Kingdom* depicts Kath (Val McLane) challenging her husband Dennis (Ricky Tomlinson) after he hits their son.

An earlier Northern PFT showcased the agency of no-nonsense women. In *Wednesday Love* (1975), two thirtysomething Manchester lasses, the brassy working-class Norma (Jane Lowe) and the milder, middle-class Jean (Lois Daine) escape their marriages by attending Billy’s Club, a city centre drinking establishment on a Wednesday afternoon, where they get off with postgraduate students Gordon (Nikolas Simmonds) and Chris (Simon Rouse). Writer Arthur Hopcraft ends his play with Jean abandoning her boring, oafish husband Bruce (Michael Byrne) and their children for Chris, evoking Nora Helmer in Henrik Ibsen’s stage play *A Doll’s House*. Hopcraft advances on his earlier *Coronation Street*-like characterisations of the forceful Mary (Jacqueline Stanbury) and the hospitable host Greta (Barbara Young) in his Blackburn-set *The Reporters* (1972) by centring his narrative on the kind, open-minded Jean. She is both physically and cerebrally attracted to the anguished intellectual Chris, which complicates the ‘no-nonsense’ archetype, as does her daring act of walking out on her previous unfulfilling life.

Colin Welland and Alan Garner depict young, middle-class Northern women Allison (Vicky Williams) in *Jack Point* (1973) and Jan (Lesley Dunlop) in *Red Shift* (1978), who are intelligent, wilful and sharp-tongued and communicate the necessity of a geographical

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<sup>129</sup> Madden & Wilson op. cit. 118.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

mobility that they enact.<sup>131</sup> Allison leaves her suburban Northern roots to study at Cambridge University, while Jan goes to London to train as a nurse: escapes comparable to Sally (Gwen Taylor) in Alan Plater's *Land of Green Ginger* (1973). Allison and Jan aspire to join sophisticated, Bohemian middle-class urban worlds. In *TLML*, Lizzie (Jan Francis) escapes via a relationship with a successful middle-class poet Daniel Tasker (David Bailie), who, it transpires, is a manipulative, exploitative liar. Unlike Lizzie, who returns chastened from her experience, or the insightful but trapped Celia in *Orkney* and Gordon in *Ploughman's Share*, Allison and Jan succeed in breaking away from stifling environments. PFT's escape master-plot echoes the real-life trajectories of Northern writers Colin Welland, Peter Terson, David Storey and David Halliwell, who primarily settled in London or the wider South.

Following *KAF*'s powerful realism in conveying intra-working-class discord, Jim Allen's *The Spongers* shows many working-class people in a Greater Manchester community ignoring local needs and hardships. A world where people sing along to 'Sons of the Sea' to signify their conformist patriotic togetherness, which papers over the material cracks, is to be escaped. We hear this militaristic naval song being performed at the social club, then later sung unaccompanied by revellers at the Middleton estate's celebration of Queen Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee. Allen shows the enveloping nature of this cultural practice in how Pauline (Christine Hargreaves) and her children join in, Pauline's smiling face belying her deeply precarious mental state. Subsequently, Pauline commits suicide, also killing her four children, due to her impossible financial situation and lack of assistance from the 'Welfare State'. At the grim climax of this societal tragedy, we hear, comparably to the collaged community voices in *TLML*, one distraught woman asking why Pauline escaped her situation like this, while another woman neighbour claims: 'she had no right to do it, she should've stuck it out like the rest of us, rather than letting them get one over on her'. This working-class woman articulates the crowd's stoicism as a troubling, cruel example of survival humour.

#### **4.4. Case-studies**

Having established a range of common and distinct representational traits across the nations and regions, we now turn to this chapter's three case-studies. In order to demonstrate PFT's strong coverage of non-metropolitan areas, they represent Scotland, the North of England and Northern Ireland, respectively: *Just Your Luck* (1972), *Thicker than*

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<sup>131</sup> Liverpudlian writer's Neville Smith's *Long Distance Information* (1979) conveys women's expectations of social mobility; this all-filmed PFT's setting is unclear, though it was all shot in Bristol.

*Water* (1980) and *A Coming to Terms for Billy* (1984). These non-idealised representations reflect the strand's defining human-centric tendency in how they present their characters' lives in their environments. They are also significant types of PFT that critics and academics have overlooked: Scottish drama infused with working-class survival humour, an itinerant comedy-drama with Northern open-mindedness and a vivid, historically-rooted Northern Irish familial soap opera. Primarily, they are representations of working-class characters, whose identities are fixed or open to change. Their narratives all contain marriages and the core PFT master-plot of characters desiring escape from spatial confines. These PFTs' characters and groups are affected by wider socio-political developments, but are not used deterministically as in agitprop. Their pragmatic humanism and informative social critiques are tangible, but are subordinated to the aim to entertain. Analysis of these dramas will discern moments of ideological significance, while emphasising that, unlike the cycle of RAIDs written by Trevor Griffiths, John McGrath and Jim Allen (1974-81), *overt* ideologies are not at their core. However, even these primarily domestic-set case-studies highlight public issues such as patriarchal power structures, domestic violence, animal rights, political and religious sectarianism and European integration. Textual analysis fuses a representational lens with an attentiveness to aesthetics and style, alongside reception by press and public.

The case-studies reflect PFT's non-metropolitan production centres: while one was made from London, the others were made by BBC Northern Ireland and BBC Birmingham. All were written by writers born in the nations and regions represented: Peter McDougall (born Greenock, Scotland, 1949), Brian Glover (born Sheffield, England, 1934; died 1997) and Graham Reid (born Belfast, Northern Ireland, 1945). Furthermore, actors in these case-studies all use distinctive accents, which signify their national and regional settings.

#### 4.4.1. 'Not a fur coat in sight'<sup>132</sup>: *Greenock in Just Your Luck* (1972)

In previewing Peter McDougall's *Just Your Luck* (4 December 1972) (hereafter *JYL*), Elkan Allan welcomed how PFT, like *Z Cars* and *Coronation Street*, was now 'mining' the 'complex dilemmas of ordinary people', providing drama 'relevant to the mass viewing audience and not just the posher section of it'.<sup>133</sup> Given that two-thirds of the Scottish-related PFTs were, using John Cook's formulation, made *by Scots* and *from Scotland*, it seems perverse to select as a case-study one commissioned from and partly made in London. However, *JYL* demonstrates how PFT distanced itself from Kailyard and Tartanry,

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<sup>132</sup> Allan, E. (1972b) Not a fur coat in sight, *Sunday Times*, 3 Dec, 52.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

while starting its complex and persistent engagement with their binary opposite, Clydesideism. It is a document of ‘lived working-class experience’, which illuminates limiting gender roles and religious and cultural sectarianism.<sup>134</sup> *JYL* has exceptionalism in being McDougall’s most sustained depiction of feminised domestic space, which established his recurrent portrayal of the family as a deeply flawed institution.<sup>135</sup> Watching it today, its script editor Ann Scott feels that McDougall’s ‘remarkable debut’ is a ‘restrained’ and ‘astonishing, beautiful piece of writing’, which still moves her.<sup>136</sup>

*JYL* concerns the rushed marriage in Greenock of a young Protestant Alison Hawkins (Lesley Mackie) to a young Catholic Alec Johnson (David Hayman) and the resulting accord and discord between the couple’s families. It establishes that the marriage will follow a bleak, long-established pattern within such working-class communities. It is mainly a VS play directed at Television Centre by Mike Newell – later to direct *Brassneck* (1975) and *Destiny* (1978) there – though 9.7% of *JYL* is 16mm filmed inserts. It opens with observational shots of urban Greenock’s grimy, graffiti-ridden buildings and bleak landscape, through which film cameraman Nat Crosby establishes a verisimilar atmosphere. The opening is edited ruminatively; shop girl Alison, amid the dilapidation, breaks off her relationship with aspiring footballer Duncan (Andrew Byatt). Later filmed shots are cut faster, conveying the bustling, raucous community gathering outside the wedding reception venue and the ragged group carrying the drunken groom Alec chaotically back to his quarters. Overall, the ASL of Newell’s film sequences is 8.4, whereas the video ASL is a markedly slower 10.7, accommodating the ensemble performances. One especially long 276-second take showcases sustained dialogue between Joe (Joseph Greig) and Colin (Gerard Slevin), the Catholic and Protestant fathers, as they bond over cheap wine (28:50-33:26).

Characters on both sides of the sectarian Protestant-Catholic divide make genuine attempts at burying the hatchet and develop amity once learning that Alec will marry Alison, whom actor Lesley Mackie recalls, McDougall based on his sister.<sup>137</sup> However, this Universalist camaraderie is built squarely, and insubstantially, on the common denominator of booze; the communication and connection become deadened. Mirroring this, Alison and Alec do not consummate their marriage on the wedding night.

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<sup>134</sup> Cook, J.R. (2008) op. cit. 112.

<sup>135</sup> Petrie (2004) op. cit. 24, 28.

<sup>136</sup> Scott, A. (2022) Interview with author, 25 Feb.

<sup>137</sup> Mackie, L. (2021) Email to author, 20 Nov.



Figures 4.3-4.4. Screen-shots – 4.3: Alison making her way to wedding bed at her Auntie's; 4.4: Alison, with her comatose husband [JYL, 54:06, 57:48].

The silent sequence where Alison quietly gets ready for bed, while Alex is asleep, drunkenly snoring, conveys deep melancholy. In this, and throughout *JYL*, Lesley Mackie's nuanced performance enacts the emotions in what is *not* said. In the play's opening, Alison explains that she works in the now dominant sector of retail, not in the mills where working-class women traditionally toiled: reflecting how she adapts to circumstances, pragmatically, rather than chooses, prefiguring her marriage's deadly disappointment.

In a downbeat, microcosmic ending, McDougall presents Alison's new everyday reality, being a wife to a largely absent sailor husband. It is revealed that Alec has been seen at a dance hall with another girl, which Alison accepts, stoically. Hers will be a dull, limited life while her husband works and indulges in adultery with impunity when back in Greenock. Emphasising Alison's entrapment, we see Duncan, now a successful footballer, on the TV set that Alison and her mother are watching. Finally, Alison adapts once again by joining a sewing bee group of older women, who are accustomed to the life that awaits *her*: implicitly, Alison is accepting her meagre 'lot' in joining her mum for a consolatory social evening of knitting and nattering. This is accompanied, pointedly, on the soundtrack by non-diegetic music: 'Welcome to our World' by the Country and Western crooner Jim Reeves – who died an early death at 40 in 1964 – intoning cosy words, which here signify grim resignation, with an underlying critique of gender conformity. Mingling with this, we hear the distinctive sound of Greenock ships' horns, evoking masculine absence and transience. *JYL* implies women should not conform fatalistically, but exert more agency.

Like virtually all PFTs, *JYL* avoids romanticising the 'working-class' as an amorphous mass. Peter McDougall writes knowledgeably from *within* the working-class community, dramatising different perspectives *within* each family and encourages empathy towards

characters within their harsh social environment. In this knowledgeable, warm but critical perspective, McDougall echoes other PFT dramatists like Barry Hines, Arthur Hopcraft, Graham Reid and Colin Welland. McDougall's four PFTs achieve Raymond Williams's expressed desire in 1969 for plays which present working-class people in 'their own terms', rather than seeing them as 'objects' via a detached, middle-class anthropological gaze, as Williams claims the writer William Trevor did; in contrast, Williams claimed that Roy Minton and Alan Plater's Wednesday Plays presented working-class characters in a more involved, empathetic way.<sup>138</sup> McDougall's understanding includes his caustic perception of people's real faults which affect their individual and social lives; such insights were criticised from within the Greenock community during production, as will be discussed later.

McDougall illuminates the widespread conformism in how 'Prods' and 'Papes' adhere to essentially the same drinking culture. There is a sad inevitability to how Isa Johnson (Eileen McCallum) and Betsie Hawkins (Mary Riggans) revert to their entrenched suspicions of the other 'side', their convivial unity proving a mirage. McDougall implies that Alison will tolerate a limiting marriage, constrained by her family's moral traditionalism. At the wedding reception, a Catholic Youth (Brian Pettifier) argues with the Protestant Hawkins Boy (Balfour Sharp), with the former accusing the 'Prods' of all voting Tory and the latter accusing the Catholics of all voting Labour, which links Clydeside's religious sectarianism with wider British political affiliations.



Figures 4.5-4.6. Screen-shots – 4.5: Isa sings 'Danny Boy' while Colin is tight-lipped; 4.6: Hawkins Boy and Catholic Youth [JYL, 45:44, 46:52].

Also during the reception, McDougall highlights everyday cultural sectarianism when the Catholic half happily sing 'Danny Boy', while the Protestant contingent sits in stony

<sup>138</sup> Williams, R.; O'Connor, A. (ed.) (2011) *Raymond Williams on Television: Selected Writings*. Abingdon: Routledge, 68-69, 78-79, 113-115.

silence (see Figure 4.5), causing Joe to suggest the less culturally-loaded ‘Nobody’s Child’, Cy Coben and Mel Foree’s 1940s song popularised in the UK via recordings by Lonnie Donegan and Karen Young.

The Catholic Johnson home is afflicted by unemployment: father Joe has never worked; thus, his son Alec’s dedication to being a sailor is psychologically significant in breaking with the pattern, though it exacerbates his neglect of Alison. While Alec’s mother, the hardened Isa, exercises her influence rhetorically via her sharp tongue, the Protestant Hawkins home contains physical violence: father Colin is shown casually striking his wife Betsie during an argument, in what is implied to be a habitual occurrence. McDougall adds a disturbing verisimilitude by directly following this with a scene where Colin is reasonable and understanding in tone when talking with Alison about her liaison with Alec; there is also mordant irony in how Colin boasts about being ‘a progressive thinker’ on education.

Eileen McCallum features in several other McDougall-written PFTs, also significantly playing Meg Menzies in the second story within BBC Scotland’s Lewis Grassie Gibbon adaptation *Clay, Smeddum and Greenden* (1976). Unlike Isa Johnson, Meg opts to live an uncompromising life filled with lusty sexual abandon, whose example her daughter Kathie (Maev Alexander) follows; being, as Meg says: ‘fit to be free and make her own choice’. Meg embodies ‘smeddum’, the story’s title: a Scots word denoting spirited vigour, spunk and determination. Meg has had nine children and is ebulliently indifferent to the Aberdeenshire villagers’ moralistic gossip about her sex life. McCallum conveys Meg’s *joie de vivre* with verve, showing considerable acting range after playing the unhappy, compromised Isa, who controls her home *fiercely*, but whose domination is hollow. While Isa justifiably upbraids her husband for being workshy, she does nothing constructive to help him. Twice during the wedding reception Isa stops Alec as he tries to get up and speak: which signifies her culpability for his emotionally stunted inarticulacy.



Figures 4.7-4.10. Screen-shots – 4.7: Isa getting on with Betsie over a drink; 4.8: Isa, hardened in her attitudes to Protestants [JYL, 35:17, 58:53]; 4.9: Meg ceilidh dancing [Clay, Smeddum and Greenden, 40:06]; 4.10: Isa ceilidh dancing [JYL, 49:46].

When Isa Johnson sings at the reception and dances when they are back in their tenement flat (see Figure 4.10), it is as joyless as the unhappy Beverly’s disco moves in *Abigail’s Party* (1977; see Chapter 2). McCallum plays Isa’s ceilidh dancing with Joe with a sozzled melancholy starkly divergent from Meg’s buoyant capering with the priest at a wedding ceilidh (see Figure 4.9). Within its historical-set PfT, the jovial ‘Smeddum’ is sandwiched between two bleaker stories; the stories cumulatively demonstrate women’s need for agency in their lives, profoundly echoing McDougall’s contemporary narrative.

#### 4.4.2. When in Normandy... Northerners in Thicker than Water (1980)

The next case-study is Brian Glover’s unjustly forgotten comedy-drama *Thicker than Water* (24 January 1980) (henceforth *TTW*). The idea was producer Tara Prem’s. Prem explains:

That was one of my attempts to be European. [laughs] I heard that there was a black pudding festival in Normandy and I said oh well, that’s great, because then we can put [together] two things that I really like: we can go to France, but we can have it quintessentially English, because they’ll be black pudding makers from Lancashire. And so I went to David Rose, he was wonderful, because I’d say, oh David, I had this really good idea, there’s a black pudding festival in Normandy, I’m going to go and research it, and he’d go, okay. [laughs] And then, I asked somebody to write it and it really wasn’t very

good [...] It didn't hit the right tone at all. [Then,] I asked Brian Glover whether he would write it, and I think he *did* hit the right tone and I think it was really interesting and good, actually. I said to David: "look, we're going to do this in France". And he went, "okay then". [laughs] We just took all the BBC Birmingham lot and used France as any other location. Everybody went over on the ferry from Southampton to Le Havre. We filmed on the ferry. When they're all in the bar getting drunk at night that's all done literally on the length of the crossing overnight. So I think it was pretty good, and I liked it because I always wanted to broaden [the] horizons of those [PFTs], and I thought that it was a very good way of doing it because you had a quintessentially regional lot of people transplanted into a different place. But what I liked about [Glover's script] was what I *hadn't* liked about the previous script: it *wasn't* a caricature, and bringing in the theme of the blood and the graves and the dead soldiers [meant] it wasn't just quaint black pudding-y stuff, jokey Northerners turning up at a jokey black pudding festival. It had other resonances, so I was very pleased with it.<sup>139</sup>



Figures 4.11-4.14. Screen-shots [TTW, 01:14, 46:55, 68:28, 62:18].

*TTW*, directed by Alan Grint, was shot on 16mm film; it is thus representative of PFT's tenth series (1979-80): the strand's only with a majority of all-filmed productions. *TTW* centres on the actual La Foire au Boudin held during 24-26 March 1979. Prem explains that people came from Germany, Austria and beyond for this Normandy black pudding festival: 'a load of international butchers had phenomenally fabulous meals'.<sup>140</sup> It has a pacey ASL of 6.9, with its especially brisk, attention-grabbing opening ten minutes having an ASL of 5.7, significantly faster than Mike Leigh's *Abigail's Party's* opening (9.2) and, of all PFT openings shot-logged, only behind *The After Dinner Game* and *Wednesday Love*

<sup>139</sup> Prem, T. (2021b) Interview with author, 12 Feb.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

(both 1975; 5.0). Like Apted's latter PFT, brisk editing lends regionally-accented drama an accessible visual grammar.

Grint and Prem, with input from Brian Glover, gathered a cast of Northern actors playing parts, which, in a PFT novelty, represent *all* three sub-regions of the North. The three English butchers who enter the Black Pudding Festival's competition include George Willis from Leeds, performed by Bury-born Ray Mort, known for playing Ern in Peter Terson's trilogy alongside Brian Glover's Art. Burnley-born John Nightingale plays Newcastle-upon-Tyne butcher Will Haggett, while the actually Newcastle-born Colin Douglas plays the Lancastrian Jackson Arnott. *TTW*'s Northern credentials are reinforced in how five of the cast appeared in Granada's soap opera *Coronation Street* from 1960-2010: Mort, Paula Tilbrook, Hope Johnstone, Ted Morris and William Tarmey, who appeared in 2,087 episodes as Jack Duckworth. Here, Tarmey plays a slaughterer in a sequence filmed at an actual slaughterhouse in Chorley, Lancashire, used to represent the source of Jackson Arnott's meat – we see pig carcasses and the blood used for the narratively central black puddings.<sup>141</sup> Tarmey recalled it was 'very disturbing [...] one of the most sickening scenes I've ever had to shoot [...]'.<sup>142</sup> This reveals actual industry practices, while reinforcing the play's leitmotif of blood.

The butchers, with wives Ida Jackson (Paula Tilbrook) and Lilian Haggett (Caroline Hutchinson), travel south, converging in Southampton for their ferry to France, so that they can compete in a black pudding festival, during Jackson's annual Normandy pilgrimage. They are also joined by butcher John (Nicholas Ball), Jackson and Ida's son, and Harry Dicks (Ted Morris), a Leeds fish and chip shop proprietor. Jackson is fanatical about William Shakespeare's history play *Henry V*, first performed in 1599, concerning events in 1415 leading up and following the Battle of Agincourt where the English defeated the French. In contrast with Jackson's *Henry V* recitations – he makes 11 throughout the play – Lilian displays a livelier engagement with the history behind Shakespeare's play, telling Ida that the Duke of Bedford, who features in the play, was 'married to that French woman, did you read what she said about her first time?' This presumably refers to Anne of Burgundy (1404-1432), whose early death was a major factor in the undoing of the alliances that had held the English kingdom together. Instead of war or politics, Lilian takes an interest in the personal sexual experience of one woman in history. Hutchinson's expression after asking her question signifies Lilian's pleasure in bawdy salaciousness and

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Tarmey, W. with Hart, A. (2011) *Jack Duckworth and Me*. London: Simon & Schuster, 80-81.

foreshadows her own forthright sexual agency (see Figure 4.15). Ida is far more amused by Lilian's worldly aside than by any of Jackson's recitations.

Supplementing Glover's sharp engagement with Shakespeare and history, producer Tara Prem explains her aim that *TTW* should represent Britain's European destiny:

In 1980, I don't think people thought much about Britain and Europe [...] I've always tried to have an open look at Europe. There was a link in that people were going to a black pudding contest, which you would think was quintessentially English but then it turns out that they were coming from all over Europe to do it. I did have an agenda, because of my background, to make things not too insular. Even though they were English Regions Drama, [they] should still realise that there was a world out there. People didn't go abroad, they didn't know that much and a lot of people were very prejudiced, but it deals with the prejudice in quite an amusing way, so I think that's all good.

*TTW* reckons with the recent past, thoughtfully. Part of Jackson's yearly ritual is to visit the cemetery where his brother Douglas is buried, after being killed serving in the liberation of Europe from the Nazis during the Second World War. For logistical reasons, Tara Prem recalls, they used 'a First World War graveyard in northern France. Not Ypres or anywhere as well-known as that. It wasn't in the script but the German gravestones and the British gravestones are a different colour, which made it very poignant'.<sup>143</sup> This year, Jackson is accompanied by his son John. Glover movingly deepens Jackson's character in this scene, revealing how he stayed behind to work on their farm as a reserved occupation while Douglas went away to fight as he 'couldn't wait to join up'. Characteristically, Jackson signs the remembrance guestbook with a Henry V quotation from Act 4 Scene 3, directly before the Battle of Agincourt: 'HE THAT SHEDS HIS BLOOD WITH ME THIS DAY...' Jackson is indignant at an Oxford resident's recent comment in the guestbook: 'what a waste'. John asserts: 'It *was* a waste, dad...' to which Jackson gives an impassioned reply:

Hadn't have been for these lads, we'd have been eating German black pudding in Lancashire today. I'm serious, John. There'd have been no England, but for these lads. They *weren't wasted*. You'd have thought someone who'd been to Oxford would have more bloody sense...<sup>144</sup>

Poignantly, Jackson reveals that Shakespeare's next words that follow his inscription in the guestbook are 'shall be my brother', conveying his expectation of wide textual knowledge: apt, given how Shakespeare is widely appreciated across Europe.<sup>145</sup> John listens to him respectfully while the scene is edited slowly, having initially been underscored subtly by Nick Bicât's mournful trumpet and slow drum. Bicât's jaunty trumpet-led underscore

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<sup>143</sup> Prem op. cit.

<sup>144</sup> See Figure 4.12, where Colin Douglas begins to deliver this speech.

<sup>145</sup> Dobson, M. (2020) Bastard foreigners, *London Review of Books*, 2 Jul [online] Available at: <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v42/n13/michael-dobson/bastard-foreigners> [accessed: 24/11/2021].

evokes Sidney Sagar's brass-led theme for Terson's Art-Abe-Ern comedies, but here is inflected with more grandeur and melancholy. The trumpet is accompanied by bass guitar and synthesizer: underlining the play's ease with modernity and change and fulfilling David Rose's edict that ERD output be entertaining and tonally 'bright'.<sup>146</sup> Bicat's music disappears once Jackson and John begin conversing in the cemetery, fulfilling PFT's 1970s norm whereby words had primacy (see Chapter 2).

Jackson claims that his brother, like the Oxfordian, hadn't 'much sense of the fitness of things'. This ambiguous comment is later revealed as Jackson building up, but failing, to tell John that he is actually Douglas's son, not his. Later, Ida tells John this truth, adding that Douglas had wanted to marry her; she only married Jackson as 'They didn't allow one-parent families in those days, John... Not in Lancashire'. John tells Ida he does not care, as Jackson has been good to him, treating him better than Richard: 'I couldn't have asked for a better dad'. This emphasises that actions, and treating people with love, are more important than your direct bloodline.

Among the younger generation of butchers, reactions are divided concerning Britain's European integration following its entrance to the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973. John takes advantage of new EEC rules in importing goods from the Netherlands more cheaply using the Monetary Compensatory Amounts (MCAs). Cannily, John tins his black pudding so that it lasts longer and can be exported to the Continent; adaptably, he voices the 'Export or Die' mantra prominent in post-imperial Britain. However, the inflexible Will claims not to understand – or *want* to understand – the idea and practice of Common Markets. He mocks the EEC's 'green pounds', a unit of account used in calculating Britain's contributions to and payments from the Common Agricultural Fund, as 'monopoly money [...] have you ever heard of 'owt so soft?' Lilian recounts Will's annoyance at EEC regulations and meat inspectors, denoting her husband's senses of English exceptionalism and individualism – which are anticipative of Brexit. In contrast, Lilian discusses buying duty-free products, which parallels the utilitarian benefits British consumers experienced via EEC membership, like lower food costs.

Subtly, Glover critiques cultural essentialism, myopic tourism and national chauvinism. Jackson's car tape-player, which he uses to play his *Henry V* cassette, is made by Blaupunkt, a company formed in Berlin in 1923, and based in Germany's Lower Saxony region from 1945-2011. Significantly, Glover and Prem stop *TTW* becoming an idealised travelogue by showing Northern French industrial factories strikingly reminiscent of those

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<sup>146</sup> Cooke (2012) op. cit. 127-128.

in Northern English landscapes. In the competition, George uses Indian cuisine to secure his victory with the sozzled judges: adding curry to his black pudding mix as ‘only a hot curry can get through to a drunken man’, having let it ripen for a month to further increase its taste. Following the roadside café stop, Harry and George develop a taste for Normandy’s patented apple brandy Calvados, while Lilian asks for ‘pink’ – the wine she loved while on holiday in Marbella, Spain. The characters partake of a European culture of convivial enjoyment of food and drink that, despite language barriers, resembles their own culture. Perceptively, this represents the emergent popularity of the cultural practice of ‘eating out’ at restaurants.

This cordiality is rooted in an ingrained drinking culture comparable to that in *JYL*. Harry’s opening remarks to their hotelier upon arrival are more demands than requests: ‘Bar? Are you waitin’ on, mate, I’m gaggin’!?’ John, aghast at the quality of some of the other European competitors’ puddings, claims – ironically, given the English characters’ alcohol intake – that their makers must be ‘only here for the beer’. While not teetotal, Jackson is more moderate in his drinking habits than the others, once refusing a drink: ‘It’s a bit early for me...’ Conversely, when they get to their Mortagne-au-Perche hotel, Will is regularly confined to bed with a hangover. Generally, the English Northerners are open to new experiences and beverages and the chauvinistic Harry comes to bluntly admire Europe’s liberal licensing laws.



Figures 4.15-4.16. Screen-shots – 4.15: Lilian displaying her salacious historical knowledge to Ida; 4.16: Will vomits [TTW, 09:53, 17:39].

Unlike Isa Johnson in *JYL* or her husband Will, Lilian is able to control her drinking: never being presented as maudlin or incapacitated. Indeed, Lilian is conscious of her own desires and acts to increase her power and autonomy, unlike Isa or Alison in *JYL*. When appearing in the Southampton pub, Lilian immediately gives John flirtatious looks and is forward with him; her flirting has practical benefits, as she desires an alternative room on the ferry, in case her husband Will locks her out! Subsequently, Lilian’s boldness is justified: we see

that Will vomits into the toilet in their room, following his excessive drinking, which implies that he rarely satisfies her desires (see Figure 4.16).

*TTW*'s climax is inflected with liberal feminism. We learn that Ida, who actually makes Jackson's competition pudding, is a director of Jackson's firm. Ida asserts her power by scotching Jackson's plan to follow the route King Henry V took back to England from Calais, insisting they go back via Le Havre. By the end, Lilian follows Ida's example in becoming a company director of Will's business. It is ambiguous whether this will reinvigorate the Haggetts' dysfunctional marriage or enable Lilian to pursue her sexual pleasure more widely, alongside her greater participation in the workplace. The latter seems most plausible, as she demands her own company car.

Belying press concern over the play's formless construction, Glover provides closure. While George and John's English 'victory' in the competition mirrors the narrative of *Henry V*, *TTW* is an infinitely more peaceable story, emphasising the logic and feeling behind British cultural and economic integration into Europe. In the run-up to competition prize-giving, all characters enjoy listening to live performances of French accordion music and a guitar-led chanson. Lilian and George share a dance, others follow and thoroughly enjoy it. Even Harry and Will, initially uncompromisingly xenophobic, change their attitudes. Will says 'au revoir' to a Frenchman and says he will return next year, while Harry swaps miniature flags with a child at the parade and waves the Tricolor happily, shouting: 'VIVA LA FRANCE!'



Figures 4.17-4.20. Screen-shots – 4.17: tense mood when arguing over the Common Market in Southampton pub; 4.18: more convivial mood at the festival; 4.19: Harry swaps flags; 4.20: final Instamatic holiday snapshot [TTW, 11:02, 62:24, 69:00, 71:42].

The enjoyable holiday exceeded its status as yearly ritual: represented by the Instamatic snapshots of smiling faces which accompany the end-credits (see Figure 4.20). Cheekily, Yves (Jacques Maury) has his arm through Ida’s arm, while Lilian and John are close together. Absent from the photo is the Arnotts’ other son Richard (Paul Jaynes), and his girlfriend Andrea (Janet Driver), who barely appear in the whole play – implicitly engaging in persistent sex – and have already left Mortagne-au-Perche after announcing their marriage. In an upbeat ending, which wittily subverts Shakespearean comedy, Glover decentres marriage, focusing instead on the shared conviviality of the French hosts and their guests, the Haggetts, Arnotts, George and Harry, whose smiling visages are captured in the image.

Brian Glover ‘was far from the thick Yorkshireman who’d blundered into thespianism, an image he enjoyed projecting to gullible interviewers’; as Glover told Shaun Usher: ‘Once you prove you’re smart under it all, you have a *tremendous* advantage’.<sup>147</sup> While Tara Prem’s innovative vision for the project, Alan Grint’s brisk direction and David Rose’s enabling role were also crucial, *TTW* demonstrates that Glover was a considerable TV playwright, drawing upon his previous life roles as teacher and wrestler to create an intellectually rich entertainment. It astutely mixes warm comedy with deeply thoughtful

<sup>147</sup> Usher, S. (1997) Gusto of a “daft Yorkie”, *Daily Mail*, 25 Jul, 49.

drama, balancing a deep respect for historical experience with an acceptance of progressive cultural change, anticipating Gareth Southgate's unifying perspective on national identity four decades on.<sup>148</sup> *TTW* shows European integration being tentatively, and then ebulliently, embraced by a diverse group of English Northerners. Glover diligently shows – rather than tells – how people can get on with each other, across local and national boundaries.

#### 4.4.3. Belfast 'people in the foreground'<sup>149</sup>: A Coming to Terms for Billy (1984)

Graham Reid's final play in the Billy trilogy *A Coming to Terms for Billy* (21 February 1984) (henceforward *ACTTFB*) is set in July 1980, during the Protestant marching season. Reid and director Paul Seed depict Billy (Kenneth Branagh) as having addressed his drinking problem, while Norman (James Ellis) has a new partner, the Northern English teacher Mavis (Gwen Taylor). Long-term PfT viewers would have known Taylor from her performance as 'Northern maid' Sally in Plater's earlier *Land of Green Ginger*. Sally has relocated to London; Plater's melancholy drama revolves around her homecoming to her native city of Hull, whose economic and civic decline is prescient of Reid's depiction of Belfast. Reid emphasises English influence: Norman had to go to England to find a job, in Birmingham. This has demographic realism and self-referential resonance as, outside the South, the West Midlands registered the UK's highest regional population increase from 1961-1991 and was the base of David Rose's ERD which made *TTW*.<sup>150</sup>

The *Radio Times* preview of Reid's final Billy play emphasised its human-centric soap opera-like qualities. Its punning headline – '**Not too late for Billy... or Lorna?**' – highlights Reid's aspiration for a fourth play centring on Lorna, being situated above an image of a smiling Branagh as Billy.<sup>151</sup> Claiming realism as a uniquely British televisual virtue, Henry Fenwick states that Reid's exemplary trilogy provides the 'sort of

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<sup>148</sup> Southgate, G. (2021) Dear England, *The Player's Tribune*, 8 Jun [online] Available at: <https://www.theplayerstribune.com/posts/dear-england-gareth-southgate-euros-soccer> [accessed: 25/11/2021].

<sup>149</sup> Flynn, B. (1996) A peace of their mind, *Guardian*, 7 Jun, A4.

<sup>150</sup> Halsey & Webb op. cit. Seemingly, no PfTs were set in Dudley, Walsall, Warwick, West Bromwich or Wolverhampton.

<sup>151</sup> Fenwick, H. (1984) Not too late for Billy... or Lorna? *Radio Times*, 18-24 Feb, 19.

productions that are quite inconceivable' on American TV: 'Raw and gritty and funny and moving and real, they would terrify any network executive'.<sup>152</sup>

77.1% of *ACTTFB* was shot on video, with this duration situated within the Martin home and Pauline and Billy's flat. Diane Menaul and Mike Selina designed these sets within BBC Northern Ireland's Balmoral studio, a showground which housed annual agricultural shows, alongside TV recording.<sup>153</sup> The play's VS majority was shot here during 28-31 August 1983. Only 2% – the opening 10 shots where Norman and Mavis arrive in Belfast on the ferry crossing from Liverpool – was shot on 16mm film on 21 August. Just over a fifth of the play was shot on 1-3 September using mobile OB video equipment. This was heavy and cumbersome, according to Seed, but far more cost-effective than film in capturing several real Belfast locations: notably, Belfast City Hall and a pub. Seed's virtuoso long-take OB tracking shot is reminiscent of Alan Clarke: following Ann and Maureen walking down the middle of the road while discussing their religious and national identities (50:52-52:04; see Figure 4.23).<sup>154</sup> Contrastingly, the VS sequences are cut rapidly, with an ASL of 7.5, characterised by dramatic shot-reverse shot close-ups of two characters in open conversational conflict (see Figures 4.21-4.22). These scenes, familiar in soap opera, evoke Raymond Williams's idea of TV drama centring on 'local interpersonal conflict' within the 'small enclosed room'.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Seed, P. (2021) Email to author, 23 Oct.

<sup>154</sup> Seed reveals that, to achieve this shot, they put the OB video camera on a tripod on the back of a Citroën 2CV, a car with suitably soft suspension. Seed (2020) op cit.

<sup>155</sup> Williams, R. (1990) *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London: Routledge, 56.



Figures 4.21-4.24. Screen-shots – 4.21 & 4.22: studio drama of faces; 4.23 & 4.24: OB drama of environments [ACTTFB, 38:43, 38:49, 51:03, 79:55].

However, the OB inserts open out the drama spatially, while lending it a temporal spaciousness with their sedater ASL of 17.4. Beyond the aforementioned tracking shot, Seed's OB breather shots are static and observational, situating the actors within everyday Belfast locations – four years before *Coronation Street* replaced its 16mm film inserts with extensive OB video, which, as Billy Smart notes, expanded the amount of location scenes using a variety of real-world places.<sup>156</sup>

Mavis exerts a powerful influence: while she met him when helping out behind the bar of his local pub, Norman now drinks far less and controls his violence. Mavis sets an example of open communication, which enables her to bond with the instinctively anti-English Ann (Tracey Lynch). Significantly enacting Reid's professed interest in how men and women interact, Mavis joins a girls' night-out, sharing a meal and drinks with Billy's Catholic girlfriend Pauline (Julia Dearden) and Lorna – on Pauline's suggestion. This evening, Pauline has not, as is customary, cooked for Billy and Norman: she simply and pointedly leaves them a can of tomato soup. While this on-the-tiles action takes place off-screen, we

<sup>156</sup> Smart, B. (2014b) Plot Inflation in Greater Weatherfield: *Coronation Street* in the 1990s, in: J. Bignell & S. Lacey (eds.) *British Television Drama: Past, Present and Future*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 70-84.

see their excitement beforehand and its tipsy aftermath: signifying everyday feminist pleasure and human sociability transcending national and religious divides. Emphasising the play's universalism, Lorna's on-screen comment on her night-out with Mavis and Pauline – 'for the first time in my life I felt like a real person' – differs from Reid's printed text: 'I felt like a real woman for the first time in my life'.<sup>157</sup> As with Lesley Mackie, Eileen McCallum, Paula Tilbrook and Caroline Hutchison's expressive performances in the previous case-studies, Gwen Taylor's playing of Mavis's open decency and Bríd Brennan's rendering of Lorna's forcefulness and irreverence deepens Reid's drama (see the latter's unscripted eye-rolling in Figure 4.27).



Figures 4.25-4.28. Screen-shots – 4.25 & 4.26: *Girls' night out*; 4.27: *Lorna eye-rolls in response to Uncle Andy*; 4.28: *Maureen switches the TV set off* [ACTTFB, 49:17, 49:18, 54:32, 19:01].

Mavis's act of slapping Billy's face smooths his acceptance of her into the family, which drily emphasises the cultural sway of violence in South Belfast.

In a late pub scene, men from the Loyalist paramilitary Ulster Defence Association (UDA) threaten Ian and Billy in the pub, as they know Billy is going out with a 'Fenian nurse'. Politics encroaching upon the Martins' lives in the pub echoes the earlier unwelcome incursion into their home of the news via their TV set. Maureen (Ainé Gorman) watches

<sup>157</sup> Reid, G. (1984b) *Billy: Three Plays for Television*. London: Faber and Faber, 156.

footage of British soldiers in training firing their weapons; the Ulster News voice-over informs us they are ready to return to Ulster, underscored by the bombastic, 'heroic'-signifying use of Richard Wagner's 'Ride of the Valkyries'. Maureen switches over to the *BBC Nine O'Clock News*, ironically broadcast on BBC1 right before this very PFT! Maureen accedes to Uncle Andy's (Mark Mulholland) demand by turning off the TV set: 'There's nothing worth a damn on it' (see Figure 4.28). This implies that BBC1 brings 1980 Troubles-related news stories into the home: harsh realities that Andy does not want to be reminded of, nor expose the children to. With further irony, given British army incursions into Northern Irish life, the following familial conversation includes Andy moaning about Ian taking his baby child out in the pram, 'like a big sissy [...] You wouldn't have done it in my day... not in Belfast anyway. Englishmen started all that nonsense'. Lorna forthrightly contradicts Andy's addled nostalgia: 'I like to see a man pushing a pram'.

Later on, the Apprentice Boys' Orange parade nears Coolderry Street, led by a drunken Ian. We learn of this after uncle Andy has looked outside: 'You ought to see your man Ian out there... pissed out of his mind... dancing about like a buck-edjit!'<sup>158</sup> Heading the flute band, Ian is capering around in passionate mimicry of the mace thrower in an Orange band, with a cloth rather than a mace. Reid's published script specifies that the band plays 'Derry Walls', but on screen we hear the band performing 'The Sash My Father Wore', a Protestant anthem that Seed calls 'a really lively and lovely piece'.<sup>159</sup> The trilogy concludes with a zoom out from the Orange March: 'IAN is dancing around with MAUREEN. Pull back on Coolderry Street'.<sup>160</sup> Director Paul Seed's implementation of Reid's stage-direction infuses a potentially detached analytical shot with communal joy. While the script prescribes that Billy and Lorna remain inside at the window watching, Seed persuaded Reid to allow them to join the others on the street, to add to 'the great ebb and flow of the play's rather joyous conclusion!'<sup>161</sup>

The final shot is a long-take of 115 seconds (79:55-81:50): Seed zooms out steadily and pans leftwards, following the jubilant immersion of the previous two shots (79:04-79:55) with an observational, almost CCTV-like gaze. We see one 'Ulster Banner' and two British union flags, the flute band at the front, kids at the rear. Instead of being in among the boisterous, ramshackle marchers, Seed presents them omnisciently from above. The

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<sup>158</sup> Ironically, actor Colum Convey was sober, whereas the Apprentice Boys were all drunk during the shooting of this scene: Seed (2020) op. cit.

<sup>159</sup> Seed Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Reid (1984b) op. cit. 171.

<sup>161</sup> Seed, P. (2021) Email to author, 21 Oct.

gradual pan upwards and leftwards pan observes the landscape: a Belfast skyline of terraces, churches, factories, hills and sky, the sound of dogs barking mingling with that of the gradually quietening flutes. This provides the pleasure of veracious recognition for Belfast viewers, alongside a distanced historical gaze which complicates the previously foregrounded communal joy. While Mavis revels in experiencing her first Orange march, she and Norman will move the core of the family, barring Lorna, to England, where there are more jobs and prospects. The camera's elegiac, distanced gaze matches this impression of transience.

This contrasts with director John Mackenzie's more immersive and experimental *mise-en-scène* in his all-filmed *Just Another Saturday* (1975). In McDougall's play, an Orange March in Glasgow, led by young mace-thrower John (Jon Morrison) turns violent when it transgresses into a Catholic area. Especially different to Seed's gaze, which projects collective communal joy supplemented by elegiac detachment, Mackenzie ends with fast-cut shots in slow-motion of John athletically throwing the mace, interspersed with the mace revolving in mid-air. This is accompanied by non-diegetic use of Welsh band The Neutrons' psychedelic rock song 'Living in the World Today' (1974), which daringly encourages our identification with John's enduring cultural belonging *despite* our earlier having witnessed the violence behind the pageantry. In contrast to this visceral filmmaking, Seed uses OB video to give Reid's human-centric, familial Billy trilogy a subtly socio-historical coda.



Figures 4.29-4.32. Screen-shots – 4.29 & 4.30: *Just Another Saturday* [75:14, 75:26]; 4.31 & 4.32: *ACTTFB* [80:26, 81:44].

In a 1996 interview, non-believing Protestant Reid outlined his humanist outlook: ‘I’ve never seen myself as a sort of missionary explaining the Irish to the rest of the world... For me it always comes down to one woman and one man and how they relate to each other. It’s politics in the background, people in the foreground, never the other way around’.<sup>162</sup> Soap narratives’ open-endedness was echoed in how Reid’s later follow-up *Lorna* (BBC1, 1987) used the same main cast. However, the Billy trilogy functions as a more humanist type of TV soap opera than most, using its greater time with fewer characters to more deeply develop them and to resolve its central storylines.

Nevertheless, the trilogy’s ending suggests, through the community turning out for the July Orange march, that politics remains deeply influential, with Ian signified as a marginal loose cannon. Whereas Norman and Billy Martin have a broadly redemptive narrative arc – emphasised through their strengthened relationships with Mavis and Pauline and Billy’s coming to terms with his mother’s death – Ian is mired in alcohol-fuelled self-pity. Ian is vulnerable to Loyalist zealotry and gives up on his family responsibilities: claiming his marriage to Valerie (Anne McCartney) was the ‘biggest mistake’ of his life. Comparably to Alec in *JYL*, the adulterous Ian has been ‘messing about a bit’ with Shirley (Chrissie

<sup>162</sup> Flynn op. cit.

Cotterill), who appeared earlier in the trilogy; like Alec and Alison, Ian is trapped and, unlike the Martins, he appears unable to learn and progress.

The following sub-section analyses press and audience reactions to the trio of non-metropolitan case-studies, which show an evolving admiration for PFT's persistent toughness and vigour, though certain critics communicated an essentialist metropolitan bias.

#### **4.5. Reception of case-studies**

Reviewers of *JYL* were balanced between antipathy and admiration for McDougall's realism. A group of critics took against the world and the characters McDougall presented, complaining of a 'dismally depressing', 'sordid' drama with 'uniformly boorish and unpleasant' characters who they couldn't identify with.<sup>163</sup> Richard Last, James Thomas and Chris Dunkley conveyed feelings of revulsion towards a play

[...] about two Glaswegian working-class families of such frightfulness that one gave thanks for the thickness of the screen separating them from us [...]<sup>164</sup>

It was all hair curlers, cheap booze, bad language, total ugliness and, a good deal of the time, accented dialogue [...]<sup>165</sup>

with despair and gloom piled on ignorance and stupidity to construct, in the environment of the kitchen sink, a human edifice no less appalling than the Greenock slum tenements in which its characters were penned.<sup>166</sup>

Dunkley, Thomas and Bernard Davies all failed to recognise McDougall's working-class survival humour.<sup>167</sup> In Michael Kittermaster's cosseted metropolitan response, he claimed naively that 'the incessant harping on Protestant and Catholic conflict [...] did not ring true and [...] suggested the play was set in Belfast, rather than on the Clyde'.<sup>168</sup>

However, Thomas and Philip Purser praised Lesley Mackie's performance as Alison as 'quietly moving' and 'spot on', while Kittermaster extolled how 'In her silences and in her tears she mirrored what the author had failed to provide her with in words. This was acting of a very high order'.<sup>169</sup> Bernard Davies saw *JYL* as insightful; Peter Lennon approved of how McDougall revealed religious bigotry 'as nothing less than the attitudinising of people with no possessions trying to give themselves some identity'.<sup>170</sup> Mary Malone, Purser and

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<sup>163</sup> Ironside, V. (1972) If this be fate, *Daily Mail*, 5 Dec, 17; Thomas, J. (1972) Last Night's TV, *Daily Express*, 5 Dec, 12; Kittermaster, M. (1972) Just Your Luck, *Television Today*, 7 Dec, 13.

<sup>164</sup> Last, R. (1972) Unwatchable level of two families, *Daily Telegraph*, 5 Dec, 12.

<sup>165</sup> Thomas (1972) op. cit.

<sup>166</sup> Dunkley, C. (1972b) Just Your Luck, *Times*, 5 Dec, 14.

<sup>167</sup> Dunkley ibid.; Thomas (1972) op. cit.; Davies, B. (1972) One man's television, *Television Mail*, 15 Dec, 18.

<sup>168</sup> Kittermaster op cit.

<sup>169</sup> Thomas (1972) op. cit.; Purser, P. (1972c) Not So Nice, *Sunday Telegraph*, 10 Dec, 19, Kittermaster ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Davies, B. (1972) op. cit.; Lennon, P. (1972) Under foreign eyes, *Sunday Times*, 10 Dec, 37.

Nancy Banks-Smith acclaimed how McDougall's 'savage eye for adversity kept comedy breaking in' to a 'funny-despairing, glottal slice of Glasgow low-life', which had 'rich flavour' and 'vigour'.<sup>171</sup>

Reactions in the regional press were mixed-to-positive. While one *Birmingham Post* reviewer resented *JYL* for its 'slummocky' protagonist Alison and only understood 'about one in ten of the broad Scots swear-words', the same publication's Teresa Metcalf felt that, when it was repeated in 1974, complaints over its strong language were unjustified as such language was an 'integral [...] feature of the situation depicted'.<sup>172</sup> Alf McCreary in the *Belfast Telegraph* found McDougall's dialogue 'sharp', the play 'real', 'true' and which 'made you shudder' at Alison's marital entrapment.<sup>173</sup>

However, *TTW* baffled the Reading *Evening Post*'s reviewer who, while finding it 'an oddly pleasant hour', was unsure of its genre and derided its subject-matter of a black pudding festival.<sup>174</sup> Conversely, Harry Thompson of Newcastle-upon-Tyne's *The Journal* unreservedly welcomed Glover's down-to-earth tone in a play with 'absolutely no social consequences (for which praise be)'.<sup>175</sup> In contrast, Thompson was repulsed by *ACTTFB*'s realism; he admires Mavis as an English contrast to what he perceives as a depressing 'Irish stew' characterised by 'thick accents' and 'unpleasantness'.<sup>176</sup> Yet, *The Journal*'s previewer Bill Pattinson had selected Reid's play ahead of Granada's *The Jewel in the Crown* as his pick of the day's viewing, perceiving it as continuing a highly promising start to PFT's fifteenth series, which he contrasts favourably to its past runs, which he calls 'an erratic and often depressing selection of modern dramas'.<sup>177</sup> Reading's *Evening Post* previewer was also positive, primarily emphasising 'Reading's Kenneth Branagh'.<sup>178</sup>

While less widely reviewed in the London press than *JYL*, Glover's play was significantly better received. There was some criticism of its storyline as being 'slight', 'formless and ramshackle [...] a connected series of glimpses of the British away from home, letting their hair down'.<sup>179</sup> Hazel Holt claimed the Chorley abattoir scene was 'unpleasant and

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<sup>171</sup> Malone, M. (1972) Rough Luck for Lovers, *Daily Mirror*, 5 Dec, 18; Purser (1972c) op. cit.; Banks-Smith, N. (1972) Just Your Luck on television, *Guardian*, 5 Dec, 10.

<sup>172</sup> Hedges, M. (1972) Television, *Birmingham Post*, 6 Dec, 2; Metcalf, T. (1974) Television, *Birmingham Post*, 20 Jul, 3.

<sup>173</sup> McCreary, A. (1972) I keep hearing bells..., *Belfast Telegraph*, 9 Dec, 7.

<sup>174</sup> Bryant, R. (1980) The black pud race: A strange mixture..., *Evening Post*, 25 Jan, 3.

<sup>175</sup> Thompson, H. (1980) Reviewing the viewing, *The Journal*, 26 Jan, 8.

<sup>176</sup> Thompson, H. (1984) Viewing Review, *The Journal*, 25 Feb, 11.

<sup>177</sup> Pattinson, B. (1984) Bill Pattinson's TV Choice, *The Journal*, 21 Feb, 3.

<sup>178</sup> Mitchell, L. (1984) The Way I Saw It, *Evening Post*, 24 Feb, 2.

<sup>179</sup> Holt, H. (1980) Glover strong on comedy and character, *Television Today*, 31 Jan, 102; Kretzmer, H. (1980) A generous helping of pud, *Daily Mail*, 25 Jan, 23.

unnecessary’, while it ‘turned’ Sylvia Clayton’s ‘thoughts to vegetarianism’.<sup>180</sup> Clayton was happier with *TTW* after the five-minute mark, when it left the slaughterhouse behind and ‘rumbled on in its easy, vigorous style’, analogising Glover’s characters to ‘seaside postcard figures’.<sup>181</sup> While Russell Davies saw it as unoriginally following ‘the grand old northern whimsical tradition of the Outing’, Harry Thompson thought it avoided silliness or exaggeration and was as refreshingly innovative as *The Faith Brown Chat Show* (LWT, 1980).<sup>182</sup>

All critics praised *TTW*’s ensemble cast; Hazel Holt claimed the ‘invaluable Ray Mort gave, as he always does, life and colour to every scene in which he appeared’, while top-billed Colin Douglas was perceived as ‘an endearing actor’, ‘who has never given a bad performance and in this play achieved a very high level of comic, moving, and dominant acting’.<sup>183</sup> For Russell Davies, the ‘women stole it’, especially Paula Tilbrook, playing ‘a wonderfully prim package of lost opportunities’ and ‘the dangerous-looking’ Caroline Hutchison, who ‘created that rarish thing, the illusion that the character had a life (some of it a bit spicy) outside the script’.<sup>184</sup> For Banks-Smith, situating these figures in a real landscape offered ‘a sort of oxygen’, abetted through Michael Williams’s ‘vivid and perceptive’ camerawork.<sup>185</sup>

Critics also highlighted *TTW*’s truth, using a realism discourse aligned with those discerned in Chapter 3, while perceiving its essential humanism. Bernard Davies observed that this entertaining play nevertheless had ‘the odd reverberation’; Herbert Kretzmer thought an ‘intermittently fascinating’ play peaked in its ‘moving’ war graves sequence.<sup>186</sup> Holt saw Glover’s dialogue as ‘funny and true’, admiring his sympathetic characterisation; similarly, Clayton saw Glover as ‘inclined to be in favour’ of both black puddings and human nature.<sup>187</sup> Despite its ‘haphazard’ construction, Kretzmer felt that *TTW* was ‘salvaged by an inherent kindness and affection for plain people’; ‘Slice it how you like’, wrote Banks-Smith, ‘it was a lovable play’.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Holt (1980) *ibid.*; Clayton, S. (1980) Black Pudding Well Milked for Comedy, *Daily Telegraph*, 25 Jan, 11.

<sup>181</sup> Clayton (1980) *ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> Davies, R. (1980) The black and white art of the master minds, *Sunday Times*, 27 Jan, 39; Thompson (1980) *op. cit.*

<sup>183</sup> Holt (1980) *op. cit.*; Davies, R. (1980) *op. cit.*; Davies, B. (1980) One man’s television, *Broadcast*, 4 Feb, 10.

<sup>184</sup> Davies, R. (1980) *ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> Banks-Smith, N. (1980) Thicker than Water, *Guardian*, 25 Jan, 11; Holt (1980) *op. cit.*

<sup>186</sup> Davies, B. (1980) *op. cit.*; Kretzmer (1980) *op. cit.*

<sup>187</sup> Holt (1980) *op. cit.*; Clayton (1980) *op. cit.*

<sup>188</sup> Kretzmer (1980) *op. cit.*; Banks-Smith (1980) *op. cit.*

*ACTTFB* was slightly more widely reviewed, and was also almost uniformly well-regarded. *JYL*'s accoster Richard Last was least favourable, bemoaning excessive 'domestic trivia: sometimes I felt I was watching a Northern Irish version of *Coronation Street* stretched to unacceptable (1 hour 25 minutes) length'.<sup>189</sup> However, even Last praised moments of insight and welcomed its decentring of politics.<sup>190</sup> Maureen Paton admired the play's gynocentric tinge and James Ellis's portrayal of fallen hard man Norman's 'impotent rage'.<sup>191</sup> Customarily for critical discussion of practically any PFT, reviewers invoked realism, here very approvingly. Herbert Kretzmer praised a 'rich, credible, collage of working class life'; John Naughton how 'authentic' it was to the 'street values' of Protestant Belfast, while Michael Church felt it conveyed how life in Belfast truly was.<sup>192</sup> Hugh Hebert compared it admiringly to the Western film genre; Church perceived its 'complexity' and how 'the pendulum never stopped swinging between bitter pain and convalescent laughter'.<sup>193</sup> Patrick Stoddart wanted the whole Billy trilogy rescreened due to its quality: 'so that we can be reassured that things in Shepherds Bush aren't quite so unpromising as a growing army of professional and political critics would have us believe'.<sup>194</sup> Here, Stoddart asserts how BBC Northern Ireland was producing exceptionally powerful drama to assist a BBC increasingly embattled, due to Thatcherism.

*JYL*'s audience was 6.06 million, above-average for PFT. While not repeated as frequently as most McDougall PFTs (see Appendix 5), it received the highest audience of any of his four plays' first broadcasts, though lower than several BBC Scotland PFTs in 1981-82.<sup>195</sup> *ACTTFB* scored a comparable audience of 6 million, the third highest for a Northern Ireland-set PFT, after trilogy opener *TLTTTB* and *Iris*. *TTW* obtained 5.53 million viewers, fractionally under the strand's overall mean average. PFT's subsequent neglect of humanistic dramas with Northern settings or protagonists during 1980-84 would have disappointed viewers, given that Glover's play achieved a Reaction Index of 68, far above the strand's mean average. Indeed, it fractionally outscored Ian McEwan's later tenth series PFT *The Imitation Game* (1980), which was more widely reviewed, has twice been repeated on TV and been released on DVD.

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<sup>189</sup> Last, R. (1984) Pankot privilege, *Daily Telegraph*, 22 Feb, 15.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Paton, M. (1984a) Revealing look at the Belfast 'toughs', *Daily Express*, 22 Feb, 27.

<sup>192</sup> Kretzmer, H. (1984a) Disease of body... and minds, *Daily Mail*, 22 Feb, 27; Naughton, J. (1984) Floppy toys, *Listener*, 1 Mar, 29; Church, M. (1984) Tempestuous toils, *Times*, 22 Feb, 10.

<sup>193</sup> Hebert, H. (1984a) Irish ties, *Guardian*, 22 Feb, 13; Church, M. (1984) *ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> Stoddart, P. (1984) Familiar faces in the crowd..., *Broadcast*, 2 Mar, 29.

<sup>195</sup> *JYL*'s one repeat, on BBC1 on 18 July 1974, reached an even larger audience of 7.12 million.

While there was no audience research report or RI figure for *JYL*, actor Lesley Mackie explains how certain locals resented, or sincerely cooperated with the production of *JYL*,

[which] had its funny moments as a play, but it did paint rather a bleak picture of life in Greenock, and the locals came out in force to voice their protests when we were filming. Even when we started at dawn, there was always a bunch of kids throwing stones, or women shouting at us. I particularly remember a loud and grating voice screaming, “Oor lassies dinnae get pregnant!” Our director, Mike Newell [...] marshalled a gang of local men to help us move the kids out of the way, but he made the fatal mistake of paying them for their services with bottles of wine. This had the effect of further aggravating the womenfolk who had enough to deal with without their men being plied with additional alcohol.

Somehow the Press latched onto our problems, and we made the front pages for a few days, with headlines such as: *BBC GO HOME!*, but despite all the trouble, we managed to finish the filming and the locals even got involved in the ‘wedding’ scene. A crowd formed as the beribboned car approached the ‘close’ and, as David Hayman and I emerged from it, several women shouted, “Good luck hen”, and one old biddy rushed across to David and gave him a big kiss.<sup>196</sup>

While ‘a few’ viewers of *TTW* shared the Reading critic’s bafflement at the subject-matter, viewers’ collective response was closer to the aforementioned Newcastle-upon-Tyne critic: ‘different, but [well-written], enjoyable and amusing’.<sup>197</sup> There was a 50:50 divide between viewer perceptions of the slaughterhouse scene as being ‘relevant’ or ‘revolting and unnecessary’.<sup>198</sup> Viewers echoed critical consensus in admiring the cast, while 85% described the production as ‘above average’, with ‘well-chosen locations’ establishing a ‘convincing atmosphere’, reinforced by the cast’s ‘realistic accents’.<sup>199</sup> This was closely echoed in viewers’ responses to the ‘highly interesting’ and ‘extremely enjoyable’ *ACTTFB*, which was widely praised for its realism and relatable characters (see Chapter 3).<sup>200</sup> Viewers strongly admired Reid’s drama for its accessible examination of ‘a very delicate family problem from all angles’; with one expressing deep appreciation of ‘a play for the modern way of life’.<sup>201</sup>

The moralistic minority of viewers who made ‘occasional complaints’ about Reid’s play for its language being ‘too foul at times’ echoed ‘one or two’ who had criticised Glover’s play for ‘bad language’ and ‘almost continual drinking’.<sup>202</sup> Following *JYL*’s repeat in 1974, Mary Whitehouse wrote to the BBC Chairman, attaching handwritten criticisms by an anonymous ‘young man’ of its ‘Awfull [sic] and blasphemous’ language; Whitehouse

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<sup>196</sup> Mackie op. cit.

<sup>197</sup> BBC ARD (1980) Audience Research Report – Play for Today: Thicker than Water, 19 Mar, VR/80/49.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> BBC Broadcasting Research (1984) Television Audience Reaction Report – Play for Today: A Coming to Terms for Billy, 19 Apr, TV/84/34.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> BBC BR (1984) *ibid.*; BBC ARD (1980) op. cit.

claimed that, ‘It really is incredible that a play of that kind could have been transmitted – presumably also in Northern Ireland – at a time of such religious tension’.<sup>203</sup> Six years on, a NVLA TV monitoring report by trainee teachers and graduate students at Westminster College, Oxford, acknowledged *TTW*’s ‘clever portrayal of its characters’, but regarded ‘the manner of the presentation’ as ‘questionable’, decrying ‘15 swear words’ and ‘23 instances of drinking’.<sup>204</sup> The NVLA also censured the play in nationalistic terms for using ‘foreign cars – a Peugeot or Porsche – instead of British Cars for the families to travel in’, regarding this as ‘not very helpful to our ailing car industry’.<sup>205</sup>

However, such moralistic responses were statistically negligible. *TTW* and, especially, *ACTTFB* elicited deep audience engagement and enjoyment through featuring characters viewers already knew and liked. When *TLTTTB* was first broadcast in 1982, it gained an AI of 71; notably, when repeated in 1983 to preface *A Matter of Choice for Billy*, it scored 79, while Reid’s second play achieved 80. The concluding *ACTTFB* obtained 83: the fourth highest RI/AI figure for a PFT from all for which I currently have data. This widely dispersed warmth is discernible in *Radio Times* letters from Clwyd, Wales, West Sussex and Bath praising *ACTTFB* as a ‘masterpiece’ and as ‘perfect television’, possessing a rare ‘realism’ which refreshingly did not present Belfast life as ‘riddled with bombs and blasts’.<sup>206</sup>

#### **4.6. Conclusion**

Quantitatively, PFT represented Greater London on screen far more frequently than any other part of the UK and it neglected other large settlements in the South just as much as those in the North or Midlands. However, it did represent Scotland and Yorkshire and Humberside commensurately with their populations, with Northern England especially well served in the mid-1970s and Scotland from 1974-82. Furthermore, from 1972, the strand gave Northern Ireland a consistently wide coverage matching its topical presence in the news. However, with a few exceptions, PFT significantly under-represented the East Coast of England – especially the North East – and Wales.

Producers Tony Garnett, Kenith Trodd and, especially, David Rose at BBC Birmingham, Pharic Maclaren and Roderick Graham at BBC Scotland and Neil Zeiger and Chris Parr at

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<sup>203</sup> Whitehouse, M. (1974) Letter to Michael Swann, 22 Jul. BBC WAC, R/78/2348.

<sup>204</sup> National Viewers’ & Listeners’ Association (1980) *£34 for this!* Arleigh: NVLA, 8. BBC WAC, R/78/2348. The report complains that drinking is ‘referred to in the play as “natural”’. Two men in the play never seemed to stop!’

<sup>205</sup> Ibid. Clearly, the NVLA would have been appalled by the BBC’s use of another European vehicle, the French Citroën, behind-the-scenes on *ACTTFB*!

<sup>206</sup> Healiss, S., Ball, S. & Iddon, H. (1984) Letters, *Radio Times*, 17 Mar, 73.

BBC Northern Ireland, spearheaded devolved PFTs made *in* non-metropolitan settings, and *by* these autonomous national and regional units. PFT used urban settings far more than rural, matching population demography. Leeds was a centre for PFT's most comedic and politicised tendencies – being home to the recurring Art, Abe and Ern trio, Harry and George in *TTW* and the striking women textiles workers in Colin Welland's epic *RAID Leeds United!* However, the strand most frequently represented the non-metropolitan conurbations surrounding Belfast, Glasgow, Liverpool and Manchester, with multicultural Birmingham and suburban Bristol also figuring notably. Belfast and Glasgow PFTs depict a shared sectarianism, alongside a closely connected language, with the phrases 'so it is', 'so you are' and 'so it will' audible in *JYL* and *ACTTFB*, though 'catch yourself on' is only in Reid's trilogy.<sup>207</sup> With exceptions, critics appreciated the worldly vigour of these PFTs as much as those set in Northern England.

Recurring motifs in non-metropolitan PFTs include drinking cultures. Drinking features heavily in Northern English PFTs but most endemically in Scottish PFTs. In PFT, drinking is a shared cultural practice, largely depicted non-judgementally, as part of verisimilar pub or club settings. In Northern Irish PFTs drinking culture is generally less prominent, though is narratively central in *ACTTFB*, wherein Billy and Norman Martin address their alcohol problems. Non-metropolitan PFTs represent marriage as a non-idealised institution, which is potentially destructive or redemptive. Infidelity is pervasive in metropolitan and non-metropolitan-set PFTs alike. In the case-studies, characters increasingly desire communicative openness and sexual pleasure, though all depict different iterations of violence affecting humans or animals, again mostly non-didactically.

Building on the master-plot of young women seeking escape from a suffocating community in PFTs by Colin Welland, Barry Collins and Alan Garner, *TTW* depicts a diverse group of upwardly-mobile Northerners seeking hedonistic pleasure abroad. This contrasts with both the defeatist stoicism of Alison in *JYL* and Pauline's escape via suicide in *The Spongers*. Extending on Welland and Garner's characterisations, Glover and Reid represent women as active agents, exercising literal mobility to change their circumstances and pursue pleasure. *TTW* goes beyond PFTs which tangentially address cultural and economic exchange between Britain and Europe to subtly link the upward mobility of Northerners Ida, Lilian and John with European integration and material worldly desires.

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<sup>207</sup> Tom Paulin notes that this latter phrase, meaning 'get wise', or 'stop being silly', was used at the beginning of the Troubles by theatre director Sir Tyrone Guthrie just before close-down on local television as a forlorn plea to the population not to go down the road of political and sectarian violence: Paulin, T. (2007) *Rude words*, in: M. Gorji (ed.) *Rude Britannia*. London: Routledge, 60.

Even characters earlier depicted as chauvinistic like Will, Harry and Jackson adapt and modify their attitudes through their enjoyment of their holiday.

Non-metropolitan PFTs display the everyday associations between Scottish, Northern English and European identities via the enjoyment of chansons, the pop song 'Y Viva España' and continental eating and drinking practices. As was customary for PFT, McDougall and Reid's dramas lack underscores, while Glover's more cinematic *TTW* uses Nick Bicât's underscore sparingly. In *JYL*, *ACTTFB* and *The Spongers*, diegetic renditions of 'Danny Boy', 'The Sash My Father Wore' and 'Sons of the Sea' demonstrate specific communities enjoying heartfelt self-expression, but which implicitly excludes outsiders. Contrarily, Bicât's underscore fuses the traditional with the modernist to emphasise an acceptance of change.

The well-received case-studies feature politics as a backdrop to their human-centric dramas of changing familial life. Nevertheless, they have a strong critical undercurrent concerning religion-based tribal sectarianism; intolerant attitudes in Greenock and Belfast are shown to be equally ridiculous as the nationalistic xenophobia that Northerners Will and Harry express early in *TTW*. PFT cautions against these real and prevalent cultural tendencies, showing viewers, non-didactically, that humanistic conviviality is a preferable outlook.

The case-studies' reception shows how roughly half of London critics, including James Thomas, Richard Last and Chris Dunkley, were repelled by *JYL* due to its colloquial language and setting among non-metropolitan working-class characters. However, other critics appreciated its distinctive survival humour: a response mirrored in viewers' highly appreciative reactions to Glover and Reid's non-metropolitan PFTs for their realism – like *JYL*, *TTW* was praised for its vigour. Marginal moralistic complainers were outnumbered by viewers who valued PFT for its complex fusing of comedy and tragedy and fully accepted challenging subject matter and tough language as its integral dramatic components. The final Chapter 5 will analyse how PFT presented marginal identities pertaining to ethnicity, sexuality, gender and class.

## Chapter 5

### ‘It’s news that isn’t passed on’: Representation in Play for Today

[T]he films we were making in the Seventies and that other people had made in the Sixties were like an account of what it was like to live in Britain at the time, although we didn’t really know this then. It wasn’t a sort of befeater view of the world or a heritage view of the world (Stephen Frears).<sup>1</sup>

In our urban world, in the streets where we walk, in the buses we take, in the magazines we read, on walls, on screens, we are surrounded by images of an alternative way of life (John Berger in *Ways of Seeing*, 1972).

**Leslie** (Stephen Moore): Well, here I am. Bourgeois, white, male, *British*... I keep saying I’m sorry, but what else can I do?

**Fay** (Josephine Welcome): Get out. And move in here. [...] I’m not nice-nice English, I’m not safe and I don’t believe in fidelity.

**Leslie**: Why?

**Fay**: It’s all part of the Revolution. I actually like it with you...!  
(PFT *Love on a Gunboat*, 1977)

**Eddie Waters** (Bill Fraser): It’s not the jokes. It’s not the jokes! It’s... what lies behind them. It’s the... attitude. [...] A joke releases tension, says the unsayable. Any joke, if you will, but a true joke, a comedian’s joke will have to do more than release tension. It must liberate the will and desire. It must change the situation (PFT *Comedians*, 1979).

I have no comments or criticism on Griffiths’s play – he said it all and I for one just watched, stunned by the shame of it all and just a little encouraged by the possibility of a new start (Michael Rose).<sup>2</sup>

Quite a lot of the time, what we’re saying to people is news... It’s news that isn’t passed on or emphasised or presented with our perspective, about their own lives... (John McGrath).<sup>3</sup>

*Please note that, in order to analyse PFT within its historical and political context, this Chapter quotes homophobic and racially offensive language.*

#### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter aims to discern persistent representational patterns in Play for Today (PFT) through detailed textual analysis, which illuminates how it represented a changing Britain. Marcus Collins sees the 1964-70 Wilson government’s legislative achievements as part of ‘a triumph for liberal progressivism’, which, Arthur Marwick details, was congruent with

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Farquhar, S. (2021a) *Play for Today: The First Year 1970-71*. Self-published: Lulu Publishing, 23.

<sup>2</sup> Rose, M. (1976) End of an Illusion, *World Medicine*, 14 Jan, 7.

<sup>3</sup> John McGrath, interviewed in *Arena: Theatre – Playwrights of the Seventies* (1977).

changes in public opinion during the Long Sixties.<sup>4</sup> The 1970s were a time of rapid change in Britain: social and economic liberalism advanced, while being contested; the Left and Right offered competing ideas for change. Andy Beckett perceives the 1970s as ‘the Real Sixties’, while Leon Hunt highlights how the 1959 Obscene Publications Act fostered Seventies ‘permissive populism’, which Julian Upton perceives was manifested in cinema’s AA certificate in 1970-82.<sup>5</sup> David Edgerton argues that what was permissible *in public* was far more significant than 1960s laws on private behaviour.<sup>6</sup> For Edgerton, the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM) and Gay Liberation Front (GLF) constituted ‘liberation [...] bringing into the public arena injustice and violence previously private and hidden, through direct action and through political activism and publications’ like *Spare Rib* and *Gay News*.<sup>7</sup>

As Rychard Carrington, Marcus Collins and Willie Thompson show, permissiveness had a socially liberal, rather than revolutionary Left, ideology.<sup>8</sup> Progressive permissiveness was co-opted in populist form by the *Sun*, following Rupert Murdoch’s takeover in 1969; the paper overtook the *Daily Mirror* in 1978 as Britain’s most popular daily newspaper and gradually shifted its allegiance to the Thatcher-led Conservative Party.<sup>9</sup> Pioneering groups like the WLM and the GLF faced a conservative backlash, which accompanied the political Right’s long-term project of ‘elite transformation’, trialled in Chile by Augusto Pinochet’s fascist dictatorship which combined liberal, free-market economics with a repressive *lack* of liberal political freedoms.<sup>10</sup> In Britain, this was manifested in what Stuart Hall discerns as Thatcher’s governments’ authoritarian populism, which appealed to possessive individualism, encouraged property ownership, venerated nationalistic symbols and used state might against political opponents who the press demonised.<sup>11</sup> Thatcher’s economic

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<sup>4</sup> Collins, M. (ed.) (2007) *The Permissive Society and Its Enemies: Sixties British Culture*. London: Rivers Oram Press, 2-3, 8-10; Marwick, A. (2007) The International Context, in: M. Collins (ed.) *ibid.* 169, 173; Collins claims this progressivism came about due to ‘the sudden relaxation of church teachings, government policies and censorship in the 1960s’ (8).

<sup>5</sup> Beckett, A. (2009) *When the Lights Went Out: Britain in the Seventies*. London: Faber and Faber, 209-233; Hunt, L. (1998) *British Low Culture: From Safari Suits to Sexploitation*. London: Routledge, 19-22; Upton, J. (2017) Innocence Unprotected? Permissiveness and the AA Certificate 1970-82, *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, (14)1, 64-76.

<sup>6</sup> Edgerton, D. (2018) *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation: A Twentieth Century History*. London: Penguin, 420-422.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 422.

<sup>8</sup> Carrington, R. (2007) ‘Questioning and Dancing on the Table’: The Ludic Liberalism of Richard Neville, in Collins (ed.) *op. cit.* 145-54; Thompson, W. & Collins, M. (2007) The Revolutionary Left and the Permissive Society, in: Collins (ed.) *op. cit.* 155-168.

<sup>9</sup> See Hunt, L. *op. cit.* 26-27.

<sup>10</sup> Davies, W. (2017) *The Limits of Neoliberalism: Authority, Sovereignty and the Logic of Competition*, Rev. Edn. London: SAGE, 138.

<sup>11</sup> Hall, S. (1979) The Great Moving Right Show, *Marxism Today*, Jan, 14-20; Hall, S. (1988) *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*. London: Verso, 190-191.

liberalism included replacing a culture of subsidy and, in TV terms, the BBC-ITV duopoly, with greater deregulation, ‘competition’ and ‘choice’. Conservative governments (1979-97) obsessively presided over the wholesale privatisation of hitherto publicly-owned assets and utilities, such as energy, water, rail and housing.

Building on Chapter 4’s findings that PFT gave varying levels of representation to non-metropolitan parts of the UK, Chapter 5 analyses how PFT represented people with comparably peripheral identities – also among the viewers a Public Service Broadcaster like the BBC must serve – alongside how it depicted more widely shared, majority identities. John McGrath shared Trevor Griffiths’s opinion that TV was the democratic medium par excellence: which enabled a theatrical style of communication with viewers, telling them stories about the present which offer an alternative to the news.<sup>12</sup> In contrast to the news, the film industry in the 1960s-70s and the bourgeois theatre tradition, McGrath feels that TV, like theatre, can hook audiences via being entertaining, then communicate politicised stories *directly*, via music and appealing to emotions, in a manner especially appreciated by working-class viewers.<sup>13</sup>

McGrath advocates drawing on ‘progressive elements’ in the working-class to subtly criticise reactionary presences in working-class comedy and life: ‘sexism, racism, authoritarianism, abuse of children, alcoholism [and] wilful intellectual self-mutilation’.<sup>14</sup> As Chapter 3 discerned, *Carson Country* (1972), *The Cheviot, The Stag and The Black, Black Oil* (1974) (*The Cheviot*) and *Leeds United!* (1974) were PFT’s most comparatively forward-looking, politically-charged dramas that critics and viewers favoured. PFT’s most thorough implementations of McGrath’s ‘socialist criticism of the audience’ are Trevor Griffiths’s *Comedians* and Carol Bunyan’s *Sorry* (1981), which dramatise the politics of personal identity in public spaces, rather than sectarianism, imperialism or industrial action.<sup>15</sup> More frequently in PFT, as this chapter will argue, criticisms of personal bigotry were subtly encoded via set designs.

This chapter will consider the following research questions:

- 1. How representative was PFT, in terms of settings and personnel who appear on screen or were employed behind the camera?

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<sup>12</sup> McGrath, J. (1996) *A Good Night Out. Popular Theatre: Audience, Class and Form*. London: Nick Hern Books, 110.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 56, 70-71, 89, 106-110. McGrath criticises Dennis Potter’s increasingly nostalgic BBC dramas in 1978-79, including, notably, *Blue Remembered Hills* (1979).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 55, 97.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 97.

- 2. How well, in quantitative and qualitative senses, did PFT convey marginalised perspectives?
- 3. Did PFT embrace or recoil from the contemporary Britain it was dramatising?
- 4. Analyse how PFT represented the public world compared to the domestic sphere.

In order to address these questions, this chapter will analyse how PFT represented four discrete forms of identity on screen:

- Ethnicity
- Sexuality
- Gender
- Social Class

This chapter's structure mirrors that of Chapter 4. Again, there will be contextual literature reviews concerning each identity, including brief overviews of British screen representations and, where germane, TWP; these are followed by gazetteers tracing historical trends in PFT's representations of each identity, aiming to attain a breadth of coverage of all fifteen series of PFT. 152 PFTs have been selected for discussion throughout this chapter.<sup>16</sup> These contain practically all PFTs which pertinently depict differences in sexuality and ethnicity; gender and class are dramatised in every PFT.<sup>17</sup> The four case-studies are representative of the strand's actor-centric VS style, but also exceptional in how they expanded PFT's representational repertoire.

While this analysis is unavoidably conducted from my contemporary perspective, I am careful to avoid simplistic condemnations of regressive textual elements, including language used in PFTs: these were dramas, and representation is not necessarily endorsement. The aim is to analyse historically, and bring past representations into dialogue with our present and future.

## **5.2. Literature Reviews**

### **5.2.1. Ethnicity**

The great Black British director Horace Ové claims that 'they would have five people on television talking about "the black problem" and no black people present to articulate their

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<sup>16</sup> I have watched or read all but six of the 152. In addition, three relevant unofficial PFTs and a Play for Tomorrow are analysed.

<sup>17</sup> Features of gender and class are, inevitably, discernible across *all* PFTs. Ethnicity and class are given proportionately less space, due to the extensive coverage of the former in Appendix 6 and, in an upcoming article for the *Journal of Class and Culture*, I analyse production design and class in a range of PFTs with party-centred narratives (1975-78). This covers issues of pleasure, leisure and materialism neglected in this Ph.D.

own problem'.<sup>18</sup> Appendix 6 documents analyses of the wide misrepresentation and exclusion of Black British people from screen media, including Stuart Hall's advocacy for the Campaign Against Racism in the Media (CARM) on BBC2 in 1979. Hall criticised racist stereotyping of Black and Asian characters in TV comedy, alongside insufficient and insubstantial roles for Minority Ethnic actors in TV drama. Actor Carmen Munroe criticised how Black performers, sometimes uncredited, were often used to 'dress the set': whose characters were often not accorded names or even any dialogue.<sup>19</sup> Benny Green discerned how a 'bizarre [...] dreadful' act on *The Wheeltappers and Shunters Social Club* (1974-77) used 'Jewishness and antisemitism as the basis for music hall'.<sup>20</sup> Such representations lingered: a 1980s sketch in *The Two Ronnies* (1971-87) featured a grotesquely caricatured 'giant rabbi'.<sup>21</sup> This chapter assesses whether PFT offered a corrective to such everyday media misrepresentations and omissions.

In 1965, The Wednesday Play (TWP) broadcast John Hopkins's *Fable*, which dramatised an inversion in the racial power dynamics of Apartheid.<sup>22</sup> Sarita Malik sees Hopkins's *Fable* as progressive in taking viewers 'on an imaginative voyage [...] to remind them that racial discrimination is based on social and conceptual, rather than biological, differences'.<sup>23</sup> Nell Dunn, Loach and Garnett's *Up the Junction* (1965) (*UTJ*) displayed Britain's uncertain progress towards multiculturalism. Black actors Winifred Sabine, Myrtle Mckenzie and Cleo Sylvestre play factory workers, who are accepted within the wider working-class group and included in its conversations. However, in *UTJ*'s mode of raw veracity, Sylvie (Carol White) voices openly racist stereotypes in a blasé manner, which her friend Rube (Geraldine Sherman) finds amusing. This brief moment is ambiguous and uncomfortable, considering *UTJ*'s admiring portrayal of cross-generational working-class people's spontaneous vigour.<sup>24</sup> While Peter Ansorge regards Garnett as a great producer, he notes that such Marxist-associated figures as Loach, Trodd, Allen and Battersby avoided representing race in their work due to their selective focus on an

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<sup>18</sup> Ové interviewed in: Pines, J. (ed.) (1992) *Black and White in Colour: Black people in British television since 1936*. London: BFI Publishing, 121.

<sup>19</sup> Malik, S. (2002) *Representing Black Britain: Black and Asian Images on Television*. London: SAGE Publications, 140.

<sup>20</sup> Green, B. (1975) A meshugena kind of poetry, *Jewish Chronicle*, 1 Aug, 9.

<sup>21</sup> Clip used in: *It Was Alright in the 1980s* series 2, episode 2 (2015).

<sup>22</sup> Another 1965 TWP was Michael Hastings's *For The West*, about pro-Lumumbists clashing with white mercenaries in the Congo.

<sup>23</sup> Malik, S. (2017) Black British drama, losses and gains: the case of *Shoot the Messenger*, in: S. Malik & D.M. Newton (eds.) *Adjusting the Contrast: British Television and Constructs of Race*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 95.

<sup>24</sup> In Peter Terson's TWP *The Apprentices* (1969), elder factory workers Spow (Charles Douthwaite) and Garrett (John Porzucek) are outspoken racist bigots, signified in a critical way, like Alf Garnett.

‘exemplary’ white working-class.<sup>25</sup> However, Sylvestre found working on *UTJ* ‘great fun and a pleasant change because I was just one of the factory girls and there was no big issue about me being black or anything like that’.<sup>26</sup>

In contrast, Charles Wood’s odd satire *Drums Along the Avon* (1967) (*DATA*) depicted ethnic diversity in Bristol as an issue and a problem.<sup>27</sup> White liberal Mr Marcus (Leonard Rossiter) wears blackface in identification with the Sikh community; the Indian Mutiny is restaged in absurdist style.<sup>28</sup> Documentarian scenes conveying the cramped, dilapidated housing conditions that Bristol’s settlers face are undercut by a facetious tone and how its Black and Asian actors have insubstantial walk-on parts: like Helen Downing, billed in the *Radio Times* as playing a ‘West Indian Tart’.<sup>29</sup> While *DATA* was Norman Beaton’s TV debut, he notes it did not immediately lead anywhere, due to the paucity of ‘black television’ and parts for Black actors.<sup>30</sup> Despite producer Tony Garnett’s publicly expressed good intentions, viewers and critics found it irresponsible; Bristol civic leaders were angry at Wood’s false association of Bristol’s migrants with drug-taking and prostitution.<sup>31</sup>

While not conservative, like George Melly claimed Wood’s *DATA* was, many liberal TV dramas and films nevertheless privileged a paternalistic white gaze: *A Man from the Sun* (1956), *Sapphire* (1959) and Armchair Theatre’s *Hot Summer Night* (1959).<sup>32</sup> These exemplify Sarita Malik’s conception of ‘white-authorized representations of blackness’, which emphasise a ‘colour problem’ that white characters are uniquely able to address, assisting lone Black protagonists.<sup>33</sup> Contrastingly, Philip Donnellan’s Birmingham-set documentary *The Colony* (1964) gave working-class Caribbean settlers an on-screen voice, unmediated. Rob Waters situates *The Colony* alongside John Elliot’s *Rainbow City* (1967) – the first British TV series to feature a Black actor, Errol John, as a lead – and Michael Abbensetts’s *Empire Road* (1978-79) as isolated landmarks of fairer representation.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Anson, P. (2021a) Interview with author, 8 Jan.

<sup>26</sup> Sylvestre quoted in: Pines op. cit. 103-104. Sylvestre values becoming part of Loach’s ‘television repertory company’, also acting in *Cathy Come Home* (1966) (*Cathy*), during ‘a very exciting time’.

<sup>27</sup> See Schaffer, G. (2014) *The Vision of a Nation: Making Multiculturalism on British Television, 1960-80*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 239, 236.

<sup>28</sup> Unlike when Grace Dwyer wears blackface in *Waterloo Sunset*, Marcus’s action is not narratively critiqued (see Appendix 6).

<sup>29</sup> **BBC Genome** [online] Available at:

<https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/search/0/20?q=%22drums+along+the+avon%22#top> [accessed: 23/02/2022].

<sup>30</sup> Beaton quoted in: Pines op. cit. 114.

<sup>31</sup> Schaffer op. cit. 238.

<sup>32</sup> Melly, G. (1967) Blacking up in Bristol, *Observer*, 28 May, 20. Melly thought the anarchistic, nihilistic anti-authority *DATA* was ‘rich’ and deserved a repeat.

<sup>33</sup> Malik (2017) op. cit. 94.

<sup>34</sup> Waters, R. (2015) Black Power on the Telly: America, Television and Race in 1960s and 1970s Britain, *Journal of British Studies*, 54, 951. Horace James also wrote four episodes of *Rainbow City*.

Gavin Schaffer highlights how Philip Martin's Pft and spin-off series *Gangsters* (1975; 1976-78) advanced significantly on the aforementioned 1960s dramas in representing the diversity of its multicultural Birmingham setting instead of being message-orientated.<sup>35</sup>

From 1947-2008, white writers who wrote about ethnicity progressively (John Hopkins), conservatively (Charles Wood), with liberal paternalism (Ted Willis), or mixed paternalism and progressiveness (John Elliot), amassed a combined 1,323 television and film screenwriting credits. In contrast, these 12 leading Black and Asian writers had just 60 such credits over 1960-2001: Errol John (3), Sylvia Wynter (1), Barry Reckord (3), Horace James (4), Obi Egbuna (1), Michael Abbensetts (23), Tunde Ikoli (5), Buchi Emecheta (2), Caryl Phillips (5), Rudy Narayan (8), Michael J. Ellis (2) and Mike Phillips (3).<sup>36</sup> Even Farrukh Dhondy and Trix Worrell had sporadic commissions, despite creating the successful Channel 4 sitcoms *Tandoori Nights* (1985-87) and *Desmond's* (1989-94).

Black British cinema emerged with Lloyd Reckord's short-film *Ten Bob in Winter* (1963) and British Asian cinema via Peter K. Smith's feature-film *A Private Enterprise* (1974) – which Tara Prem's Second City Firsts TV play *A Touch of Eastern Promise* (1973) predated. Horace Ové's film *Pressure* (1976) presented increasingly 'rebellious' second generation Black Britons.<sup>37</sup> Radical films were made in 1980-86 by Franco Rosso, Menelik Shabazz and John Akomfrah, including the latter's *Handsworth Songs* (1986), resulting from the ACTT and Channel 4's Workshop movement. More recently, McQueen's *Small Axe* (2020) and Michaela Coel's *I May Destroy You* (2020) have transformed Black British representation.

### 5.2.2. Sexuality

Historian Jeffrey Weeks, while not underplaying the value of post-Wolfenden liberal legislative reforms, notes how their key enablers in Parliament, including Wilson's Labour governments (1964-70), did not try and change minds and win public acceptance for gay rights.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, in 1975, only 16% of British people believed that homosexual couples should be able to live together openly, with 53% opposed.<sup>39</sup> For Weeks, reformers' moderate and top-down approach was mirrored culturally in how gay people were spoken

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<sup>35</sup> Schaffer (2014) op. cit. 251.

<sup>36</sup> These, and figures for Elliot, Hopkins, Willis and Wood, utilise the IMDb, and include separate episodes of series and serials [accessed: 25/02/2022].

<sup>37</sup> Ové's *Playing Away* (1986) – written by Caryl Phillips – is a carnivalesque Film on Four concerning an urban Black British cricket team playing a match in a primarily white English village and triumphing as underdogs.

<sup>38</sup> Weeks, J. (1977) *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*. London: Quartet Books, 173.

<sup>39</sup> Collins op. cit. 13.

for, patronisingly, by heterosexual liberals, with few if any gay voices allowed to speak for themselves.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Terry Sanderson, writer of a monthly *Mediawatch* column in the *Gay Times*, argues that, in the British press during the 1970s and 1980s, ‘We were written *about* rather than being allowed to speak for ourselves’.<sup>41</sup> By 1995, while TV had improved *somewhat*, the British press – especially the tabloids – remained prone to virulent, hateful homophobia.<sup>42</sup>

Sanderson perceives TV as a comparatively progressive medium, being much more open-minded in its repertoire of representations and including gay voices more than most of the press.<sup>43</sup> TV was more attuned to cultural changes which included self-assertive, open expressions of gay culture like the theatre troupe Gay Sweatshop – founded in 1974-75 by a collective including Drew Griffiths – and the GLF and Campaign for Homosexual Equality, whose bottom-up street politics included the writer and broadcaster Ray Gosling speaking out in Trafalgar Square in November 1975.<sup>44</sup> This newly forceful tendency was mirrored on TV, as popular historian Stephen Bourne explains in his account of representational progress, itself indebted to *Gay News* TV critic Keith Howes’s analyses.<sup>45</sup>

In PFT’s pre-history, John Hopkins’s TWP *Horror of Darkness* (1965) presents a stark three-hander narrative centring on gay protagonist Robin Fletcher (Nicol Williamson), ‘a sad, tortured soul’, a compelling drama comparably ground-breaking to Basil Dearden’s liberal feature-film *Victim* (1961).<sup>46</sup> Keith Howes recalls this ‘excellent play’ making ‘a huge impression’ on him when he watched it on an ‘old horrible pre-625-line little tiny screen’, so he could view it separately from his parents.<sup>47</sup> He recalls feeling: ‘This is your life, really, you’re watching your life, and you think [...] I just don’t want to *be* this. I don’t want that at all’.<sup>48</sup>

Bourne identifies another WP, Peter Terson’s *The Last Train Through Harecastle Tunnel* (1969), as ‘enjoyable’ and a representational first in depicting a same-sex encounter in a

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<sup>40</sup> Weeks op. cit. 174-175, 185, 190.

<sup>41</sup> Sanderson, T. (1995) *Mediawatch: The Treatment of Male and Female Homosexuality in the British Media*. London: Cassell, 2.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. v-vi, 122-204. Marcus Collins details how, in 1977-81, attitudes became more progressive towards homosexuality, but more conservative again during 1983-88, the era of High Thatcherism: Collins op. cit. 14.

<sup>43</sup> Sanderson (1995) op. cit. 21, 30-32.

<sup>44</sup> Weeks op. cit. 185, 265.

<sup>45</sup> See my book review: May, T. (2020b) Stephen Bourne, Playing Gay in the Golden Age of British TV, *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, (17)3, 417-420. This review contained three errors: Anton Rodgers’s character is in bed with Polo, *not* Nigel Havers’s; it was Stephen Harrison, not ‘Stuart’, and Micheál MacLiammóir’s name was misspelled.

<sup>46</sup> Bourne, S. (2019) *Playing Gay in the Golden Age of British TV*. Cheltenham: The History Press, 79.

<sup>47</sup> Howes, K. (2020) Interview with author, 21 Aug.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

public place, known in the gay community as ‘cottaging’.<sup>49</sup> More problematic, however, is its inclusion of Jackie (Griffith Davies), an eccentric ‘queen’ stereotype undermined through his presentation as a bizarre episodic sideshow. While many light entertainment and comedy performers skilfully performed queen personae, situation comedies such as *Are You Being Served?* (1972-85) and *It Ain’t Half Hot, Mum* (1974-81) presented unsympathetic lone gay characters used as the ‘butt of masculine humour’.<sup>50</sup> Weeks, Sanderson and Howes critique stereotyping and caricatures in Clive Exton’s comedy-drama series *The Crezz* (1976).<sup>51</sup> Howes and Bourne perceive a progressive turning-point epitomised by *The Naked Civil Servant* (1975) – directed by PFT stalwart Jack Gold – and Howard Schuman’s bravura non-naturalistic series *Rock Follies* (1976).<sup>52</sup> Bourne’s historical endpoint is PFT writer Leslie Stewart’s drama for the schools strand *Scene Two Of Us* (1988), which naturalistically depicts homophobia, but also joyously breaks with naturalism in its moving and celebratory dramatisation of Matthew’s (Jason Rush) and Phil’s (Lee Whitlock) relationship.<sup>53</sup> Bourne neglects Michael Wilcox’s *Lent* (1985), a poignant 1950s-set Screen Two drama where gay identity is unutterable, but present.

Nevertheless, Sanderson also cites the Lesbian and Gay Broadcasting Project’s 1986 *Are We Being Served?* report, based on monitoring of one week’s broadcasting media output in 1985, which found that only 1.85% of actuality broadcasting had represented gay and lesbian people.<sup>54</sup> In 1994, a Broadcasting Standards Council report similarly revealed the paucity of gay or lesbians on TV: who represented just 0.03% of all characters in programmes monitored in May and September 1993.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, gay viewers – specifically selected as non-activists – expressed a desire for less stereotypical representations in comedies and depictions which emphasised that gay people had a particular sexual preference, alongside more programmes that specifically informed and entertained gay viewers.<sup>56</sup> According to Bourne, British TV drama *had*, in its ‘Golden Age’ managed such specificity. For example, W. Stephen Gilbert’s *The Other Side* production of Drew Griffiths and Noel Greig’s *Only Connect* (1979), which explored the

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<sup>49</sup> Bourne (2019) op. cit. 82-83.

<sup>50</sup> Woolley, B. (1984) Drama: Coming Out, *Listener*, 19 Jul, 29.

<sup>51</sup> Weeks op. cit. 228; Sanderson op. cit. 17; Howes, K. (1976b) On the box, *Gay News*, 104, 7 Oct, 26. *The Crezz*’s limitations are inherent in one episode’s title: ‘Bent Doubles’.

<sup>52</sup> Howes, K. (1977b) Gays on Television 1960 – 1977, Part 2: The Fat Years, 1975-77, *Gay News*, 132, 1 Dec, 22-25; Bourne, S. (2019) op. cit. 124-153. Howes’s Part 1 had described 1960-74 as ‘The Lean Years’. However, this era did include the first gay kiss on TV, between Ian McKellen and James Laurenson in *Edward II* (1970) and an openly gay protagonist Daniel (Daniel Massey) in *The Roads to Freedom* (1970).

<sup>53</sup> Bourne *ibid.* 192-196. Netflix’s teen drama *Heartstopper* (2022) and Channel 4’s comedy *Big Boys* (2022) impressively consolidate Stewart and Russell T. Davies’s varied styles of storytelling.

<sup>54</sup> Sanderson op. cit. 18-19.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 240

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* 239-240.

legacy of the visionary gay socialist Edward Carpenter through an encounter between Graham Johnson (Sam Dale) and John Bury (Joseph O’Conor). For Bourne and Howes, *Only Connect* was ‘a masterpiece’ and ‘sensational work in the truest sense: changing our perceptions’.<sup>57</sup>

Occasionally, the BBC could be overly self-congratulatory over how enlightened its PFTs were and inaccurately claim representational ‘firsts’. Keith Howes questions Irene Shubik’s professed pleasure at producing Tony Parker’s *A Life is For Ever* (1972), which she thought ‘for the first time showed homosexual “sex” in an honest light’; Howes criticised its characterisation of McCallister (Tony Meyer) as a stereotypical ‘sly and neurotic’ gay man.<sup>58</sup> *Gay News* critics saw certain other PFTs as either stereotyped or failing to challenge homophobia – *Children of the Sun* (1975), *The Sin Bin* (1981) – or which downplayed gay identity and desire like *Wednesday Love* (1975), *Two Sundays* (1975), *The Sin Bin* again and *The Groundling and the Kite* (1984) (TGATK).<sup>59</sup> John Russell Taylor was critical of Trevor Griffiths’s *Comedians* for not dissecting and renouncing Gethin Price’s use of homophobic language in his act: disappointing given its direct criticism of racism, sexism and jokes targeted at Jewish and Irish people.<sup>60</sup> However, Howes feels that the PFT *Commitments* (1982) presented ‘loveable’ characters and he generally feels that PFT regularly represented gay men on screen who he could recognise.<sup>61</sup>

### 5.2.3. Gender

The UK’s offshoot of the WLM made an immediate impact with its demonstration at the Royal Albert Hall which disrupted the televised *Miss World 1970* – broadcast the day after Douglas Livingstone’s PFT comedy *I Can’t See My Little Willie* had, not uncritically, conveyed a lecherous male psyche via voice-overs and dream sequences. From March 1971, the WLM marched in London, while the Labour governments of 1966-70 and 1974-76 legislated for equal pay and made sex discrimination illegal. Despite such agitation and reform, British society remained overwhelmingly patriarchal in its distribution of power. In 1975, while public attitudes to birth control and contraception had liberalised, they had not

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<sup>57</sup> Bourne, S. (2019) op. cit. 168-169. The latter quote is Howes’s, which Bourne cites.

<sup>58</sup> Howes, K. (1977a) Gays on Television 1960 – 1977, Part 1: The Lean Years, 1960-74, *Gay News*, 131, 17 Nov, 24; Shubik, I. (2000) *Play for Today: The evolution of television drama*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 85.

<sup>59</sup> Howes (1977b) op. cit.; Taylor, J.R. (1979) Funny, *Gay News*, 178, 1 Nov, 30; Cooper, E. (1981a) Television, *Gay News*, 212, 2 Apr, 7; Bennett, P. (1975a) Gay exploits, *Gay News*, 71, 22 May, 20; Sanderson, T. (1984) Mediawatch, *Gay Times*, 73, Sep, 14. In contrast to Howes (1977b), *GN*’s contemporary reviewer Peter Bennett found *Two Sundays* ‘delicate and intelligent’: Bennett, P. (1975b) Men and boys, *Gay News*, 82, 25 Sep, 19.

<sup>60</sup> Taylor (1979) *ibid*.

<sup>61</sup> Howes (2020) op. cit.

concerning divorce, and most women regarded permissiveness less positively than feminists did.<sup>62</sup>

In 1928, Virginia Woolf noted the historical prevalence of ‘wife-beating’ as ‘a recognized right of man [...] practised without shame’ across social classes.<sup>63</sup> In the 1970s, gendered violence was increasingly identified and challenged, including domestic violence: a ‘widespread, everyday phenomenon affecting people of all classes and genders, though women are disproportionately likely to suffer domestic or sexual violence’.<sup>64</sup> The phrase ‘domestic violence’ was first used in Parliament by Jack Ashley MP in 1973, following campaigner Erin Pizzey’s creation of the first domestic violence shelter in Chiswick. To address this social problem, the Labour government’s Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act 1976 created civil protection orders for victims. The WLM now focused on women’s safety outside the home, enabling the ‘Reclaim the Night’ protests in Leeds from November 1977, which demanded that women be able to move throughout public spaces at night, free of the threat of male violence or rape.

From 1970-75, it was discerned how screen media privileged male viewers. Echoing a major insight of John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* (1972), Sheila Rowbotham reflected on how she felt conditioned to watch women like men did, through her experience of watching the striptease sequence in The Beatles’ TV film *Magical Mystery Tour* (1967).<sup>65</sup> In a seminal 1975 essay, Laura Mulvey detailed how women in most narrative cinema are symbols of male desire, mere objects for the male gaze to contemplate: ‘In herself the woman has not the slightest importance’.<sup>66</sup> Mulvey notes how female actors’ bodies are displayed in fragmented close-ups, ‘with the quality of a cut-out or icon’.<sup>67</sup> Women provide spectacle passively, while the male protagonist – who viewers identify with – displays agency in advancing the narrative.<sup>68</sup>

Mulvey’s call to demolish the illusionary male gaze was popularised by journalist Jean Stead, writing when many women were being murdered in Yorkshire, amid misogynistic perceptions that women victims’ status as sex workers lessened Sutcliffe’s crimes.<sup>69</sup> Stead supported Leeds feminist women who threw red paint at the cinema screen when the

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<sup>62</sup> Collins op. cit. 13-15, 20-25. Collins also claims that younger people were more permissive.

<sup>63</sup> Woolf, V. (1973) *A Room of One’s Own*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 43-44.

<sup>64</sup> Groves, N. & Thomas, T. (2013) *Domestic Violence and Criminal Justice*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 19.

<sup>65</sup> Rowbotham, S. (1973) *Woman’s Consciousness, Man’s World*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 40-41.

<sup>66</sup> Mulvey, L. (2009) [1975] Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, in: *Visual and other pleasures*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 20.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 20-21.

<sup>69</sup> See Liza Williams’s documentary series, *The Yorkshire Ripper Files: A Very British Crime Story* (2019).

Hollywood film *Dressed to Kill* (1980) was being shown, due to its depictions of male violence and also proposed a male curfew: ‘A few nights away from the pub wouldn’t do them any harm and it might help them to imagine how it feels to be a woman’.<sup>70</sup>

In a 1980 *Time Out* article, Rosalind Coward widened Rowbotham’s and Mulvey’s attacks on patriarchal screen representation, criticising Gigi’s ‘Underneath they’re all Lovable’ billboard advertisement for reflecting and circulating sexism with its message – that underneath women want sex, whatever they say – and being ‘an invitation to rape’.<sup>71</sup> Coward noted how legal judgements in rape cases often include ‘she asked for it’ discourses, which echo society’s double-standards in judging female sexuality.<sup>72</sup> Coward’s analysis was pre-figured in Fay Weldon’s perceptive TV play *Act of Rape* (1977), which conveys jurors’ flippant attitudes and the law’s inadequacies and callousness. Weldon’s drama was prefaced by a filmed documentary sequence, which insensitively brought real-life rape victim Penny back to the scene of the crime to recount her experiences, and followed by a studio discussion with a majority of male panellists – including two MPs, two doctors, a QC and a Professor – who dominate the conversation.<sup>73</sup>

Patricia Holland discerns how the *Sun* newspaper spoke in a double address to female and male readers, encouraging women to please men and aspire to be like its Page Three ‘girls’, while habitually satiating male desires through the daily spectacle of different nude women.<sup>74</sup> Holland documents how male British Leyland workers cut these images out and placed them in their workplace spaces, reducing the pictured women to passive objects of desire.<sup>75</sup> While John Ellis has cautioned against applying Mulvey’s ideas to TV, given that its domestic viewers glance at TV casually, ‘keeping an eye on events’, Helen Wheatley argues that TV *can* instil an ‘enraptured gaze’, for all viewers.<sup>76</sup> Both Ellis and Wheatley discern TV’s bias towards facial close-ups instead of bodily fragmentation; unlike cinema, the TV close-up or talking-head(s) shot, being closer in actual dimensions to the viewer’s own face, generates an equality and intimacy.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Stead, J. (1980) Now is the time to stand up and fight, *Guardian*, 5 Dec, 10.

<sup>71</sup> Coward, R. (1987) Underneath we’re angry, in: R. Parker & G. Pollock (eds.) *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women’s Movement 1970-1985*. London: Pandora Press, 144-146.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> The discussion was chaired by Jacky Gillott.

<sup>74</sup> Holland, P. (1983) The Page Three Girl Speaks to Women, Too, *Screen* (24)2, 88-93. Holland notes how the *Sun* treats its readers as fun-loving pleasure-seekers, set against opponent out-groups, like feminists, Labour Party politicians and other newspapers’ readers, who are discursively framed as killjoys.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 99.

<sup>76</sup> Ellis (1992) *Visible Fictions: Cinema: Television: Video*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London: Routledge, 50, 137; Wheatley, H. (2016) *Spectacular Television: Exploring Televisual Pleasure*. London: I.B. Tauris, 217-222.

<sup>77</sup> Ellis *ibid.* 131, 142; Wheatley *ibid.* 94, 155-157.

Micheline Wandor regards the ‘kitchen sink’ designation of John Osborne’s lauded theatre play *Look Back in Anger* (1956) as a discursive misnomer, given its narrative’s marginalisation of women.<sup>78</sup> To Wandor, Osborne’s play shows masculinity in crisis with a rare ‘honesty and violence’, while also exemplifying the Lady Macbeth Syndrome, whereby male identity is based on an ‘annihilation of motherhood’.<sup>79</sup> Wandor perceives how, in dramas by Bertolt Brecht, Edward Bond and Osborne’s fellow PFT dramatists Trevor Griffiths, David Hare and David Edgar, women figure as metonymic metaphors or as representatives of the constraining ‘nuclear family’; motherhood is neglected.<sup>80</sup>

Contrastingly, other PFT dramatists Arnold Wesker and Stephen Lowe represent the family as where the public (political) and private (domestic) meet and are *not* ‘driven violently apart’.<sup>81</sup> Wandor sees Shelagh Delaney’s and Doris Lessing’s gynocentric dramas as possessing a colloquial populism she compares to that of *EastEnders* (1985- ).<sup>82</sup>

In 1983, Wandor noted how TV producers were risk-averse, preferring to commission established male playwrights; therefore, excluding women dramatists.<sup>83</sup> Wandor argues that women fringe theatre writers who *did* break into TV write for sitcoms and soaps, not the single-play: thus, being denied opportunities to experiment and develop their voices.<sup>84</sup> Echoing Horace Ové’s and Terry Sanderson’s perceptions that Black and gay people were spoken *for* by others on TV, rather than allowed to speak for themselves, Wandor perceived that TV elites saw women’s perspectives as ‘deviant’, not integral, with male writers permitted to “do” this ‘minority subject matter’.<sup>85</sup> Wandor’s germane call for parity in the employment of women writers nevertheless neglected the work of Weldon, Julia Jones and Nemone Lethbridge; Madeleine Macmurrough-Kavanagh has analysed how Jones and Lethbridge’s popular WPs conveyed subversive coded messages about the Catholic Church and the English legal system.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Wandor, M. (2001) *Post-War British Drama: Looking Back in Gender*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London: Taylor & Francis, 41-42.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* 96.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* 48, 151-153, 168-169, 191, 207-212.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* 92, 204.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* 93. With the working-class composition of its regular characters and its aversion to didacticism, *EastEnders* partly drew on Joan Littlewood’s populist theatre legacy, as did PFT creators John McGrath and Barrie Keeffe. See Buckingham, D. (1987) *Public Secrets: EastEnders & Its Audience*. London: British Film Institute, 42-43, 94-96. *EastEnders* regulars who earlier played top-billed roles in PFT include Ray Brooks, June Brown, Perry Fenwick, Elaine Lordan, Roger Sloman, Pam St. Clement, alongside character-actors like Michael Cashman, Tony Caunter, Gerry Cowper, Leonard Fenton and Mona Hammond.

<sup>83</sup> Wandor, M. (1983) Where are the new voices? *Listener*, 25 Aug, 29.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Macmurrough-Kavanagh, M.K. (2014) Too Secret for Words: Coded Dissent in Female-authored Wednesday Plays, in: J. Bignell & S. Lacey (eds.) *British Television Drama: Past, Present and Future*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 191-202. Macmurrough-Kavanagh analyses Jones’s *A Bit of a*

Helen Baehr claims that male-authored PfTs *Housewives' Choice* (1976) and *Do As I Say* (1977) (*DAIS*) co-opt feminist issues while affirming the patriarchal family.<sup>87</sup> Writers Roy Kendall and Charles Wood present their 'feminist' characters Marcia (Frances de la Tour) and Hilary (Kate Nelligan) as 'unnatural, ridiculous and wrong', their concern with women's rights is portrayed as pretentious, propagandist and, in Hilary's case, a foreign incursion against British common sense.<sup>88</sup> Conversely, Vicky Ball identifies a range of Female Ensemble Dramas (FEDs), centring on women: *Shoulder to Shoulder* (1974), *Rock Follies/Rock Follies of '77* (1976-77) and *Tenko* (1981-82, 1984-85).<sup>89</sup> Ball regrets the historical decline of FEDs, which questioned women's sexual exploitation, and the shift from 1970s radical and socialist feminism to 1990s post-feminist domesticity.<sup>90</sup>

Certain British films encouraged a critical mind-set in viewers, and challenged the male gaze: Richard Woolley's *Illusive Crime* (1975), Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen's *The Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977) and the Berwick Street Film Collective's *Nightcleaners* (1975), an equally challenging counterpart to *Leeds United!* Holland highlights Mulvey's influence on a feminist turn in TV writing, including Paula Milne.<sup>91</sup> Katie Crosson observes how the camera in Carol Bunyan's *Sorry* avoids fetishising or misrepresenting the act of rape, fragmenting Kate's (Meg Davies) body, or sensationalising through a suspenseful underscore.<sup>92</sup> For Crosson, it is 'the rare portrayal of sexual assault as lengthy, serious and nauseating'; women viewers and critics found it disturbingly realistic, unlike uncomprehending male viewers and critics.<sup>93</sup>

#### 5.2.4. Class

I use Raymond Williams's definition of class: 'a general word for a group or division'.<sup>94</sup> In 1959-60, the top 7% of the UK population owned 84% of national wealth: a profoundly unequal distribution which *The Economist* argued should be addressed by greater home ownership and a wealth tax.<sup>95</sup> John McGrath used this statistic for the name of his left-

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*Crucifixion, Father* (1968) and Lethbridge's trilogy of legal dramas that commenced with *The Portsmouth Defence* (1966).

<sup>87</sup> Baehr, H. (1980) The 'Liberated Woman' in Television Drama, *Women's Studies Int. Quart.*, (3), 29-39. Earlier, in *Spare Rib*, Baehr briefly mentioned these two plays: Baehr, H. (1977) book review: *Is This Your Life? Images of Women in the Media*, edited by Josephine King and Mary Stott, *Spare Rib*, Apr, 38.

<sup>88</sup> Baehr (1980) *ibid.* 38.

<sup>89</sup> Ball, V. (2013) Forgotten sisters: the British female ensemble drama, *Screen*, (54)2, 244-248.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Holland, P. (2000) *The Television Handbook*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London: Routledge, 126-127.

<sup>92</sup> Crosson, K. (2021) Play for Today: Sorry, **Forgotten Television Drama**, 16 Apr [online] Available at: <https://forgottentelevisiondrama.wordpress.com/2021/04/16/play-for-today-sorry/> [accessed: 04/03/2022].

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Williams, R. (1988) *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London: Fontana Press, 60.

<sup>95</sup> Anon (1966) Taxing Britain's Wealth – I: The Indefensible Status Quo, *The Economist*, 15 Jan, 217-219. They proposed that a wealth tax should replace ineffective death duties in order to achieve more equal wealth distributions.

wing 7:84 theatre company, which nevertheless emerged in the 1960s and 1970s era when Britain was, historically, actually at its most equal: its Gini coefficient measuring inequality was a low 0.24 from 1975-78; Margaret Thatcher's governments caused it to rise to 0.34 by 1990.<sup>96</sup>

Class has been understood as the site of conflict; this was spatially defined by David Smith in his empirical account of unquestionable regional divides (see Chapter 4). Patrick Joyce explains how many radical populists in the 1840s era of Chartism invoked 'the people' or 'decent folk', 'conceiving of the true England as the industrial north in struggle with Privilege'.<sup>97</sup> People in that era rarely used the language of class, but they did clearly communicate class antagonisms. Anticipating Raymond Williams's idea of culture as a structure of feeling, Richard Hoggart perceives a deep sentiment among working-class people that 'the world is divided into 'Them' and 'Us', with working-class people being disadvantaged.<sup>98</sup>

Hoggart and Bernice Martin have analysed how working-class people's exuberant uses of leisure are nevertheless rule-bound, while being critical of working-class communities' exclusionary conformism, anti-intellectualism and exertion of 'pressure to keep down with the Atkinses'.<sup>99</sup> Sociologist Basil Bernstein noted how people's speech is determined by their social relations. He found that the working-class majority used restricted codes, including more structurally limited syntax and vocabulary, in alignment with their group, whereas middle-class people used elaborated codes, including more expansive syntax, vocabulary and abstract conceptualisation to express a more individuated consciousness.<sup>100</sup> Via British education's formal examination system, it is the latter's individualism, rather than any greater intelligence, which is rewarded.<sup>101</sup>

Links between ethnicity, sexuality, gender and class need attention, as Rhian E. Jones has rightly argued, while extolling the political Left's long history of intersectional cooperation.<sup>102</sup> Though Karl Marx elided 'the possible intersections between class exploitation and the exploitation of women', Friederich Engels in *The Origins of the*

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<sup>96</sup> UCL Social Research Unit (2020) Gini coefficient income inequality measure, **Closer** [online] Available at: <https://www.closer.ac.uk/data/gini-coefficient-income-inequality-measure/> [Accessed: 30/03/2022].

<sup>97</sup> Joyce, P. (ed.) (1995) *Class*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 161-167.

<sup>98</sup> Williams, R. (1965) *The Long Revolution*. Harmondsworth: Pelican, 57-88; Hoggart, R. (1966) *The Uses of Literacy*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 72-73.

<sup>99</sup> Hoggart *ibid.* 84-85, 147-148; Martin, B. (1995) Symbols, Codes, and Cultures, in: P. Joyce (ed.) *Class*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 259.

<sup>100</sup> Bernstein, B. (1964) Elaborated and Restricted Codes: Their Social Origins and Some Consequences, *American Anthropologist*, (66)6, 66-67.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Jones, R.E. (2013) *Clampdown: Pop-Cultural Wars on Class and Gender*. Winchester: Zero Books, 11, 24.

*Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884) linked ‘the origins of sexual domination to the emergence of private property’, perceiving the Victorian nuclear family’s capitalist basis.<sup>103</sup> Elizabeth Garnsey argues that women both have lesser-paid jobs, while contributing overwhelmingly more to unpaid domestic labour.<sup>104</sup>

Jones extolls the same culture of working-class advancement through education that several Northern Irish PFT writers celebrate (see Chapter 4).<sup>105</sup> As Carol Dyhouse explains, class identity can be changeable; in the post-Second World War world, ascribed status was superseded by personal achievement: many women, including several who worked on PFT, advanced via increased educational opportunities at grammar-schools, art-schools and comprehensives.<sup>106</sup> Actor Claire Nielson recalls the 1960s-70s as a time of ‘incredible optimism and creativity’ when she and many others believed in coming equality, while actors John Telfer and Chris Jury emphasise how actors’ pay-scales *were* much fairer than today.<sup>107</sup> Implying the reasons for current inequality, Jack Shepherd reflects that how private education in Britain ‘has continued at the expensive of comprehensive education is a deadly problem’.<sup>108</sup>

Historian Huw Beynon perceives a historical shift in patterns of screen representations away from heavy industry: the heroic worker (1900-50) is followed by the alienated worker (1950-91), then diffuser depictions of unemployed or service-sector workers (1991-). Beynon charts the decline in construction, mining and manufacturing jobs and growth in services jobs from the era of *UTJ* (1965) to the post-Cold War world – alongside the under-representation on-screen of the enlarged group of casualised, low-paid workers produced via deregulation and trade unionism’s decline.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Giddens, A. & Held, D. (1982) *Classes, Power, and Conflict: Classical and Contemporary Debates*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 419.

<sup>104</sup> Garnsey, E. (1982) Women’s Work and Theories of Class and Stratification, in: A. Giddens & D. Held (eds.) *Classes, Power, and Conflict*, *ibid.* 425-445.

<sup>105</sup> Jones, R.E. *op. cit.* 47-48, 97.

<sup>106</sup> Dyhouse, C. (2011) *Glamour: Women, History, Feminism*. London: Zed Books, 205. For example, Linda Beckett, Jenny Brewer, Alma Cullen, Linda McCarthy and Jane Wood went to grammar-schools, while Chrissie Cocks, Janette Foggo and Richard Manton went to comprehensives: Beckett, L. (2020) Interview with author, 29 May; Brewer, J. (2021) Interview with author, 7 Jul; Cullen, A. (2020b) Interview with author, 20 Apr; McCarthy, L. (2021) Interview with author, 11 May; Wood, J. (2021) Interview with author, 4 Mar; Cocks, C. (2021) Interview with author, 11 Jun; Foggo, J. (2021) Interview with author, 20 Oct; Manton, R. (2021) Interview with author, 22 Feb. Jack Shepherd hated grammar-school while loving art-school, but accepts he gained a lot from the former: Shepherd, J. (2022b) Interview with author, 3 May.

<sup>107</sup> Nielson, C. (2021) Interview with author, 10 Mar; Jury, C. (2022) Interview with author, 11 Jul; Telfer, J. (2021) Interview with author, 29 Nov.

<sup>108</sup> Shepherd (2022b) *op. cit.*

<sup>109</sup> Beynon, H. (2001) Images of Labour/Images of Class, in: S. Rowbotham & H. Beynon (eds.) *Looking at Class: Film, Television and the Working Class in Britain*. London: Rivers Oram Press, 30-34.

Melvyn Bragg has claimed that TWP ‘gave a voice to the working-class’.<sup>110</sup> Reflecting on his own experience as an actor, TWP producer Tony Garnett discerns the long-established pattern of British screen representations of working-class parts being highly stereotypical, ‘patronised’ as criminals, loyal, chirpy soldiers or as comic relief.<sup>111</sup> Garnett describes his own work since 1965 as TV and film producer as a ‘Trojan Horse’ endeavour to bring truer working-class voices and stories into the mainstream, following the Royal Court and British New Wave, but being ‘unashamed about going for a big audience’ on TV.<sup>112</sup> Garnett’s identification of a class condescension that needed addressing mirrors that of Horace Ové, Terry Sanderson and Michelene Wandor concerning cultural elisions of ethnicity, sexuality and gender.

Class definitions are complex and must include self-identification, education, accent, occupation – and that of parents – cultural tastes and asset ownership, including property. To analyse class in PFT, the following analysis uses a quantitative study of trends in its class representation over time, while qualitative analysis builds on the *Rank: Picturing the social order, 1516-2009* exhibition in discerning PFT’s visual representations of people’s relational positions within the societal hierarchy.<sup>113</sup> It assesses how far PFT fulfilled Garnett’s aims to broaden class representation, while discerning underlying patterns in the strand’s structures of feeling concerning class divides in Britain.

### **5.3. Gazetteers – representation of identities in PFT**

#### **5.3.1. Ethnicity**

In 1991, 7% of the UK population self-identified as being of minority ethnicity.<sup>114</sup> In 1980-83, the Jewish population was 0.6%.<sup>115</sup> PFT occasionally enabled creative input from Black or Asian writers, though only for 1% of its output.<sup>116</sup> However, PFT employed Jewish

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<sup>110</sup> Bragg in: *Melvyn Bragg on TV: The Box That Changed the World* (2017). Bragg’s claim is illustrated by clips from Garnett’s TWP productions *UTJ* and *Cathy*.

<sup>111</sup> Garnett, T. (2001) Working in the field, in: Rowbotham & Beynon (eds.) *Looking at Class*, op. cit. 70-71.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. 71-73, 79.

<sup>113</sup> Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art (2009) *Rank: Picturing the Social Order*. Sunderland: NGCA.

<sup>114</sup> ESRC Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity (2012) How has ethnic diversity grown 1991-2001-2011?, **Web Archive**, Dec [online] Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20150724032955/http://www.ethnicity.ac.uk/medialibrary/briefings/dynamicsofdiversity/how-has-ethnic-diversity-grown-1991-2001-2011.pdf> [accessed: 22/02/2022]; Laux, R. (2019) 50 years of collecting ethnicity data, **Gov.UK: History of Government** [online] Available at: <https://history.blog.gov.uk/2019/03/07/50-years-of-collecting-ethnicity-data/> [accessed: 22/02/2022]. This figure, however, did not allow identification as mixed-race.

<sup>115</sup> Waterman, S. & Kosmin, B. (1986) *British Jewry in the Eighties: A Statistical and Geographical Guide*. London: Board of Deputies of British Jews, 9.

<sup>116</sup> Generally, PFT include writers and directors in similar proportions to Centre Play (1973-77) and *Crown Court* (1972-84). This chapter’s first case-study will show how Irene Shubik’s progressive commissioning matched advances in series like *Rainbow City* and *Empire Road*. Peter Anson, producer of the latter, enlisted Indian writer H.O. Nazareth’s *The Garland* (1981).

writers (or devisers) and directors on at least 23 PFTs, 7.8% of the total.<sup>117</sup> Producers included London-born Irene Shubik (26 in 1970-75), daughter of French and Russian Jewish migrants, and Tara Prem (2 in 1979-80), who was born to Indian and Irish migrants.<sup>118</sup>

Few PFTs perpetuated the paternalistic liberal paradigm of non-white characters' representation. PFT's three main tendencies in representing ethnicity are: **irreverent multicultural populism, analytical multicultural socialism** and **everyday multicultural realism**. PFT very occasionally included unnamed characters to 'dress the set', but more regularly gave Black and Asian actors rounded roles.

PFTs present a gallery of affluent, middle-class or suburban characters who use racist language. These include: Joe's (Mark Eden) inexplicably anti-Semitic wife Moira (Claire Nielson) and assorted working-class Glaswegians in the overstated unofficial PFT *Gunfight at the Joe Kaye Corral* (1983), petit-bourgeois businessman Ted Hardin (Maurice Roëves) in *The Operation* (1973), Aileen's (Patti Love) unseen parents in *Baby Love* (1974), liberal academic Mark Childers (Timothy West) in *The After Dinner Game* (1975) and an affluent airline passenger Arnold (William Squire) in *Buffet* (1976). Suburban Tom Bates (Denholm Elliott) in *Brimstone and Treacle* (1976) expresses the racial fear and loathing that underlies his respectable veneer. The incisively documentarian *Billy* (1979) shows a golliwog, troublingly in the corner of the frame, among toys in a local authority-run children's care home.

Occasionally in PFT, everyday racism features linguistically and visually, and is *sometimes* critiqued. Racist and anti-Semitic attitudes are narratively undermined in *The Bouncing Boy* (1972), *Shutdown* (1973), *Gangsters*, *Dinner at the Sporting Club* (1978), *The Network* (1979) and *Hard Feelings*, while racist language features more neutrally in *England's Greens and Peasant Land* (1982) (EGAPL), *Willie's Last Stand* (1982) (WLS) and *Dog Ends* (1984). While Jim Allen's WLS reveals its bigoted working-class characters' limitations, its neutrality makes it exclusionary in the way Michael Abbensetts and Peter Anson perceived.<sup>119</sup> Doug Lucie's otherwise highly incisive *Hard Feelings* (1984) is

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<sup>117</sup> These include Mike Leigh, Les Blair, John Goldschmidt, Jon Amiel, Jack Rosenthal, Bernard Kops, Arnold Wesker, Stephen Poliakoff, Maurice Edelman, Elaine Feinstein, Lionel Goldstein and the Jewish-Catholic Marcella Evaristi. Only six of these PFTs centred on explicitly Jewish characters.

<sup>118</sup> PFT writers born overseas included Nemone Lethbridge – born to a military family in the British Raj – and Leslie Stewart, born and raised in Libya, who moved to England when he was 17. Stewart had an Arab mother and Scottish father and 'very much had an Arab childhood': Stewart, L. (2021) Interview with author, 1 Jul. Other behind-the-camera roles were conducted by the Black, London-born film cameraman Remi Adefarasin (4 PFTs, 1974-84) and India-born film editor Tariq Anwar (c.4 PFTs, 1980-82, including *Murder Rap*).

<sup>119</sup> See Anon (1978) RACE, *Broadcast*, 11 Sep, 20-21.

undercut by Black character Lloyd's (Michael Skyvers) minimal role; *Desert of Lies* and *King* (both 1984) offered analytical and historical correctives.<sup>120</sup>

Jack Rosenthal's *Bar Mitzvah Boy* (1976) and Mary O'Malley's *Oy Vay Maria* (1977) were broad, popular comedies concerning Jewish and Catholic families. While Ben Azai disliked how Rosenthal presented Jewish culture to Gentile viewers, most Jewish Londoners surveyed felt it 'showed us ourselves'.<sup>121</sup> Kenith Trodd saw O'Malley's 'well done' play as overly 'traditional', 'reassuring' and trafficking in 'racial stereotypes'.<sup>122</sup> However, Dymphna's (Cheryl Hall) irreverent eye-rolling and deadpan modern asides to her mother Bridie (Carmel McSharry) lend this cosier PFT depth.

John Mortimer's *Rumpole of the Bailey* (1975) adhered to liberal paternalism in how the Black teenager Ossie Gladstone (Herbert Norville), accused of knife crime, is cleared in court by benefactor Horace Rumpole (Leo McKern). John Elliot's scrupulous, Namibia-set docudrama *Child of Hope* (1975) clearly indicts Apartheid, but foregrounds white journalists Richard A. Falk (Ed Devereaux) and Joel Carlson's (Leon Gluckman) authoritative reports to camera.

PFT's paradigm of irreverent multicultural populism featured multi-faceted, central Black and Asian characters using racist language about people of other ethnicities: realistically, as Peter Anson argues.<sup>123</sup> Philip Martin's *Gangsters* and Leon Griffiths's *A Passage to England* (1975) defy liberal paternalist screen representations of Black characters as innocent victims or grateful beneficiaries.<sup>124</sup> Instead, Aslam Rafiq (Saeed Jaffrey) is a guileful business and political operator, while the seemingly naïve Anglophile Anand (Tariq Yunus), successfully cons boat captain Onslow (Colin Welland) with a proposition that he will trade his bar of gold, worth more, for £15,000 in return for a safe passage for himself and his family to England. Griffiths subtly evokes the context of Ugandan Asian

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<sup>120</sup> Brenton's is one of relatively few PFTs to highlight Britain's imperialist history. See Appendix 6 for an analysis of how Keefe's *King* is exemplary in presenting a Black British family as part of the national political conversation.

<sup>121</sup> Azai, B. (1976) Personal Opinion, *Jewish Chronicle*, 24 Sep, 58; Anon (1976) Barmitzvah Boy, *Jewish Chronicle*, 17 Sep, 9. Les Blair's *Bet Your Life* (1976) includes elliptical criticism of Jonathan Ross's (Richard Ireson) political Zionism.

<sup>122</sup> Trodd, K. (1978) Blue Pencil and Scissor Show, *Broadcast*, 18 Sep, 20.

<sup>123</sup> May, T. (2021a) Philip Martin (1938-2020) Part Three: Peter Anson on script editing *Gangsters* (BBC 1976-78), plus contributions from David Edgar and David Rudkin, **Forgotten Television Drama** [online] Available at: <https://forgottentelevisiondrama.wordpress.com/2021/05/13/philip-martin-1938-2020-part-three-peter-anson-on-script-editing-gangsters-bbc-1976-78-plus-contributions-from-david-edgar-and-david-rudkin/> [accessed: 25/02/2022].

<sup>124</sup> Thomas Clarke's *Victims of Apartheid* (1978) partially inhabits this irreverent mode: Clarke mocks well-meaning white liberal paternalists, while displaying the harrowing effects of George's (John Kani) brutalisation by Apartheid torturers, via casually showing him hitting Kelly (actor uncredited).

migration to Britain, and validates Anand's cheeky craftiness, anticipating Duggan's account of adapting to survive in *The Muscle Market* (1981).<sup>125</sup>

During 1973-81, an analytical multicultural socialism informed many PFTs, where characters learned through acting and communicating. Nemone Lethbridge's *Baby Blues* (1973) highlights commonalities between affable Black Nurse Ezra (Claudette Critchlow) and joke-telling Jewish doctor Mr Crowley (Sydney Tafler). These NHS workers look after expectant Lavinia (Zena Walker) on her private ward somewhat better than the superstitious, prickly white nurses (Rosalind Knight and Bettina Dickson) and Lavinia's arrogant, adulterous, drinking and gambling husband Sir Dominic (Norman Rodway).<sup>126</sup> While writer Bernard Kops disputes that PFT was 'left-wing propaganda', the conclusion to his beautiful fable *Moss* (1975) is one of PFT's most profoundly human anti-capitalist moments.<sup>127</sup> In David Edgar's *Destiny* (1978), Gurjeet Singh Khera (Saeed Jaffrey), a former subaltern in the British Raj, leads strike action in his workplace. In Barrie Keeffe's *Waterloo Sunset* (1979), Grace Dwyer (Queenie Watts) learns from her loving Black friends (see Appendix 6). In Jeremy Paul's *A Walk in the Forest* (1980), activist Nelson (Abraham Osuagwu) convincingly analogises the persecution of Black people in Apartheid South Africa and Jewish 'refuseniks' in Soviet Russia.

Les Blair's improvisational *Beyond the Pale* (1981) (*BTP*) was, as its Yiddish advisor Dovid Katz claims, 'an act of historical justice' in its nuanced, humanising representation of Yiddish-speaking London Jewry and left-wing anarchism in the East End.<sup>128</sup> Rosie (Natasha Morgan) and her Workers' Club comrades fight back against the far-right British Brothers' League's attacks on Jewish areas in Whitechapel and Bethnal Green. Horace Ové and H.O. Nazareth's *Shai Mala Khani – The Garland* is set in the Bangladeshi community in contemporary Birmingham.<sup>129</sup> It addresses themes of inter-racial marriage, assimilation, difference, corruption and the arranged marriage of Mohammed Huq (Albert Moses) and Nadira (Katy Mirza).<sup>130</sup> It shows street-level racism from a white skinhead

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<sup>125</sup> Sandhu, S.S. (2020) *A Passage to England*, **Play for Today – Volume One** [BluRay, BFIB1393], booklet, 33.

<sup>126</sup> Lethbridge, N. (2022) Interview with author, 29 Mar.

<sup>127</sup> See Chapter 2 for analysis of the intercultural connections forged in Kops's London-set *Rocky Marciano is Dead* (1976). In contrast, Elaine Feinstein's *Breath* (1975) shows Mrs Pritchett's toxic nostalgia's roots in exclusive nationalistic myths; property developer Clint's base materialism anticipates that of Moss's sons.

<sup>128</sup> Katz assisted with linguistic and cultural detail: Katz, D. (2021) Interview with author, 24 May.

<sup>129</sup> Comparable to Katz's advisor role on *BTP*, producer Peter Anson employed a Bangladeshi Adviser Nurunessa Chowdhury to aid authenticity.

<sup>130</sup> This follows a scene where the Muslim Huq divorces his first wife over the phone: a reversal from the scene in Jehane Markham's *Nina* (1978), where Russian Jewish dissidents Nina (Eleanor Bron) and Yuri (Jack Shepherd) hastily, and unwisely, marry over the phone.

gang, while the British Home Office's crackdown leads to Nadira's arrest as an 'illegal immigrant'.

Three PFTs in 1978-81 contain speeches urging inter-cultural dialogue and working-class unity against ruling-class attempts to divide on ethnic lines. Trade unionist Don Matthews (Roderick Smith) in *Destiny* consciously echoes Martin Niemöller's (1892-1984) famous 'First they came for the Communists...' quotation of 1945.<sup>131</sup> As does Andy (Paul Copley) in Stephen Lowe's *Cries from a Watchtower* (1979) (*Cries*) and a Docklands Cockney resident (Ron Welling) in *BTP*, whose words propose the sort of cooperation between the Irish and Jewish communities which later defeated Sir Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists in the Battle of Cable Street in October 1936.<sup>132</sup>

Two scenes in autumn 1979 PFTs have a distilled socialist analysis. In Trevor Griffiths's *Comedians*, abattoir worker Mr Patel (Moti Makan) tells a gentle Jewish joke, which he has translated into a Hindu context, which is universally applicable to working-class people's shared economic experiences. Jim Hawkins and Horace Ové's exceptional *A Hole in Babylon* explores the motivations of Black protagonists, Frank Davies (T-Bone Wilson), Wesley Dick (Archie Pool) and Bonsu Monroe (Trevor Thomas), who take hostages at a Knightsbridge Italian restaurant. A hostage from poor South Italy (Franco DeRosa) pleads with Frank to release an ill hostage and wins Frank over through his appeal to class solidarity, which chimes with Frank's experiences in Nigeria.<sup>133</sup> The harshness of their subsequent real-life sentences – shown in closing on-screen captions – is a 'damning political indictment' of white institutions.<sup>134</sup>

The final category of liberal PFTs situate Black, Asian or Minority characters within Britain's unremarkable, everyday multiculturalism: *Baby Love*, *Early Struggles* (1976), *Come the Revolution* (1977), *The Thin End of the Wedge* (1977), *Cries*, *3 Minute Heroes* (1982), *Atlantis* (1983) and *Shall I Be Mother?* (1983).<sup>135</sup> PFTs set in Northern NHS hospitals – *The Bouncing Boy*, *Through the Night* (1975), *Our Flesh and Blood* (1977) and *Intensive Care* (1982) – feature Black and Asian health professionals and patients, played by Danielle Delon, Lucita Lijertwood, Angela Bruce, Jamila Massey and Shope

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<sup>131</sup> See Marcuse, H. (2016) The Origin and Reception of Martin Niemöller's Quotation, "First they came for the communists..." in: M. Berenbaum, R. Libowitz & M. Sachs Littell (eds.) *Remembering for the Future: Armenia, Auschwitz, and Beyond*. St Paul, MN: Paragon House, 173-199.

<sup>132</sup> Katz's good friend Bill Fishman attended the Battle of Cable Street: Katz op. cit.

<sup>133</sup> Nobody dies in the Spaghetti House Siege, while the Southern Italian hostage wishes Frank, Wesley and Bonsu well in their cause when they release him.

<sup>134</sup> Shaw, S. (2015) Screening black political struggle on 1970s British Television: the case of the Play for Today, *A Hole in Babylon* (1979), *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, (35)3, 500.

<sup>135</sup> Unlike the soul-funk band Gonzalez in *Early Struggles*, the Caribbean-connoting steel-band's sounds, though profoundly welcome, are somewhat shoehorned into *Atlantis*.

Shodeinde, who transcend ‘dress the set’ functions. In John McGrath’s *The Bouncing Boy* and Alan Bennett’s *Intensive Care*, elder characters’ anti-Semitism and racism is challenged.<sup>136</sup>

In Michael Hastings’s *Murder Rap* (1980), Ernest De Wolfe (Larrington Walker) recounts his ancestors’ slavery, but is also a model assimilated British citizen and family man. Where *Destiny*’s Khera develops his consciousness, the Bengalis in *Murder Rap*, resented by locals, are omitted, beyond spokesperson Altab Shahid’s (Albert Moses) brief appearance. Among the 12 PFTs Eleni Liarou analyses, she notes how *Destiny*, *A Hole in Babylon* and *3 Minute Heroes* foreground political agency, ‘black resistance’ and ‘intercultural exchange’.<sup>137</sup> Some PFTs used prototypical colour-blind casting skilfully: Alan Erasmus in *Hard Labour* (1973), Derek Griffiths in *Her Majesty’s Pleasure* (1973), Olu Jacobs in *The Amazing Miss Stella Estelle* (1984) (*TAMSE*) and Don Warrington as that PFT rarity, an efficient, caring social worker, in *Billy*.<sup>138</sup> Atmosphier Danze member Edmundo John recalls his creative input to the boot-boy can-can dance in *3 Minute Heroes*, a subversive ‘repositioning’ of racist skinheads’ violent culture.<sup>139</sup>

These three representative paradigms improve on *DATA* in not representing Blackness as a problem or an ‘issue’ and in valuing skilled performers. A subsequent case-study will show how *In the Beautiful Caribbean* (1972) anticipated PFT’s analytical socialism, and granted its Black actors exceptional centrality.

### 5.3.2. ‘I like a bit of variety’<sup>140</sup>: Sexuality

**Lewis Duncan** (Anton Rodgers): Mrs Cooper, when one is gay, homosexual... It doesn’t necessarily mean that you have to be lonely... I mean, there must be what, something like 4 million homosexuals in this country. Nobody’s going to tell me they’re all miserable and unhappy (PFT *Coming Out*, 1979).

This section assesses PFT’s depiction of lives of gay men, gay women and people who are transsexual, transvestites or heterosexual. The following gazetteer traces PFT’s historical development in its representations, demonstrating a four-stage progression: from stereotyping to covert difference, followed by overt difference and, finally, everyday

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<sup>136</sup> However, the actor playing Dr Bannenjee in the former is uncredited.

<sup>137</sup> Liarou, E. (2021) The Diverse Spaces of Play for Today, *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, (19)2, 190. In *3 Minute Heroes*, Rhoda (Beverley Tate), who knows Boz, who is handing out far-right leaflets, disarms and embarrasses him by giving him an exaggeratedly cheerful greeting.

<sup>138</sup> Erasmus was the future co-founder of the Manchester-based record label Factory Records. Unusually anticipating unsavoury aspects of gangsta rap culture, Trodd, who cast Warrington in *Billy*, also cast Norman Beaton in the absurdist *The Last Window Cleaner* (1979) as policeman Leroy, who propounds a bizarre Conspiracy Theory fusing homophobia and anti-Catholicism.

<sup>139</sup> John, E. (2021) Interview with author, 4 Aug.

<sup>140</sup> Quote is from Billy (Clifford Kershaw) in *Wednesday Love*: ‘I like a bit of variety in my clubs, keeps me well informed’.

acceptance, while considering whether PFT's narratives were innovative or stale in how they conveyed LGBTQIA2S+, or queer, experiences of sexuality.

Fulfilling PFT's aim as drama to centre on conflict, it more frequently depicted heterosexual relationships as fraught and distant than as harmonious and close. Infidelity is a consistent PFT theme; this is observable in extreme microcosm in five PFTs shown in June-July 1973.<sup>141</sup> Such discord features in several of Chapter 4's, and this chapter's, case-studies. Heterosexual characters' homophobia is narratively critiqued by Northern dramatists such as Colin Welland and Arthur Hopcraft. This paralleled the transition from covert to overt representations of different sexualities, exemplified by Simon Gray's depictions of closeted gay men shifting to David Rudkin and Watson Gould's openly non-normative central protagonists. Building on this greater directness, PFTs from 1979-84 increased the variety of representations, aiming to foster greater mainstream understanding and everyday acceptance of people with different sexualities.

17 PFTs included central characters connoted – whether covertly or overtly – as gay men, bisexual men, lesbian women, transsexual women or sexually indeterminate women. This 5.8% figure is close to the UK Department of Trade and Industry's estimate that, in 2003, 5-7% of the population was LGB.<sup>142</sup> Public Health England and responses to the 2021 Census suggest lower figures of 2.5% and 3.2%, respectively, but there have long been feelings – voiced by Lewis Duncan in *Coming Out* – that the true figure is nearer 10%, as many 'shun labels'.<sup>143</sup> Collectively, *Gay News* and *Gay Times* reviewed or mentioned all but three of these PFTs.<sup>144</sup> At least 15 more PFTs – plus one Play for Tomorrow – have

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<sup>141</sup> These exclusively South-East England-set PFTs include: Penelope Mortimer's *Three's One* and Charlotte Bingham and Terence Brady's *Making the Play*, both small-cast chamber dramas centring on heterosexual infidelity. John Harvey-Flint's *Edward G: Like the Film Star* features the spectre of adultery, while Les Blair's *Blooming Youth* and Julia Jones's *The Stretch* portray fundamentally troubled, unhealthy relationships between men and women.

<sup>142</sup> DTI (2003) *Final regulatory impact assessment: Civil Partnership Act 2004*. London: Department of Trade and Industry, 13 [online] Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file23829.pdf> [accessed: 08/02/2022].

<sup>143</sup> PHE (2017) *Producing modelled estimates of the size of the lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) population of England Final Report*, London: Public Health England, 23 [online] Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/585349/PHE\\_Final\\_report\\_FINAL\\_DRAFT\\_14.12.2016NB230117v2.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/585349/PHE_Final_report_FINAL_DRAFT_14.12.2016NB230117v2.pdf) [accessed: 08/02/2022]; ONS (2023) Sexual orientation, England and Wales: Census 2021, ONS, 6 Jan [online] Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualorientationenglandandwales/census2021> [accessed: 09/01/2023]; Shaw, J. (2023) Sexual orientation census undercounts older people and those who shun labels, *Guardian*, 6 Jan [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/06/sexual-orientation-census-undercounts-older-people-and-those-who-shun-labels> [accessed: 09/01/2023].

<sup>144</sup> Those not assessed by *Gay News* include the earlier two Simon Gray plays and *Penda's Fen*.

been identified which more tangentially represent minority sexuality; for example, via walk-on characters whose difference is signalled.

In some PFTs, working-class and middle-class characters use homophobic language, naturalistically, akin to aforementioned racist utterances. In realist PFTs of prison life, several characters use homophobic slurs. The worldly Woodbine (Bob Hoskins), one of nine murderers who appear in Jimmy O'Connor's lively, uncouth *Her Majesty's Pleasure* – set in a Broadmoor-like institution – verbally mocks the prim Mrs Whiteheart (Richard Pearson), who resembles a closeted 'queen' stereotype.<sup>145</sup> O'Connor playfully ridicules the working-class, self-anointed 'villain' Jumbo's (John Bindon) affronted homophobia by implying his defensiveness is due to his own sexual insecurity.<sup>146</sup> O'Connor shows homosexuality as pragmatic and unremarkable in this maximum-security prison environment, with Limehouse and Arsenic (Peter Firth) implied to be enjoying a sexual relationship. Tony Parker's more limited *The Sin Bin* depicts lifers in a similar institution, including prisoner Peter Williams (Willie Jonah), who is disgusted at being nicknamed 'Nancy'. In contrast to Parker's hard-hitting, even-handed *When the Bough Breaks* (1971) (*WTBB*), Emmanuel Cooper saw its characters as 'mere cardboard cut-outs' and lamented its 'amazing omission' of sex.<sup>147</sup>

Other PFTs depict working-class characters using homophobic language. Most innocuously, in Tony Perrin's Stoke-set *Shutdown*, pot-bank labourer Maurice (Dave Hill) asks at the bar for 'two beers for two queers' in humorous self-deprecation, for himself and Bernie (Freddie Fletcher). In Perrin's later *Light* (1979), Wally Edge (Michael Graham Cox) is an outspoken trade unionist, portrayed as part of a stifling bureaucratic shadow-state, who persecutes the recalcitrant electrician Jack (Jim Norton). Edge expresses casual, vehement homophobia, very like Charlie Harris (Ray Smith) in Henry Livings's Northern comedy *The Mayor's Charity* (1977), who is as incensed at gay people as he is about the Town Hall's establishment class. Ron Hutchinson ridicules such attitudes, non-didactically, using politically-incorrect language in his Belfast-set oddity *The Last Window Cleaner*.

These incidences were understated, socially-critical undercurrents within the wider narratives, in contrast to Colin Welland's unsparing dissection of homophobic attitudes among pupils and teachers in a Manchester secondary modern school in his Granada play *Roll On Four O'Clock* (1970). Stephen Bourne praises Welland's discernment that

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<sup>145</sup> Oddly, Whiteheart articulates moralistic attitudes reminiscent of Mary Whitehouse.

<sup>146</sup> This critique would feature later in *Even Solomon* (1979), one of this chapter's case-studies.

<sup>147</sup> Cooper (1981a) op. cit. See Chapter 3 concerning *WTBB*'s wide acclaim with viewers and critics.

homosexuality existed amongst working-class schoolboys like Peter Latimer (Frank Heaton) and for conveying the boy's 'sense of isolation and desperation'; even the wise, kindly gay art teacher Mr Fielder (Clive Swift) fails to get through to Peter, as the narrative concludes tragically.<sup>148</sup> In Welland's PFT *The Hallelujah Handshake* (1970), the mentally-ill David Williams's (Tony Calvin) ambiguous sexuality disturbs the Methodist community, some of whom believe malicious gossip that he may be a threat to their children and he faces homophobia from a group of labourers.<sup>149</sup> Welland guides viewers to empathise with troubled underdogs Peter and David. In Welland's *Jack Point* (1973), the teachers audition a group of 'rugger' lads for the chorus of Yeomen in their school production of Gilbert and Sullivan's Savoy Opera *The Yeomen of the Guard*. To the tune of the 'Eton Boating Song', they sing customised lines including: 'And we're all queers together, excuse us while we go upstairs...' The teachers rule the lads out due to their inadequate singing technique rather than their homophobia: which affirms Welland's criticism of this grammar-school environment.<sup>150</sup>

Indeed, PFT shows that ignorance and crass language use are prevalent across social classes. In Brian Clark's *The Saturday Party* (1975), Emma (Judi Bowker), teenage daughter of the middle-class Elkinsons – based in Surrey's stockbroker belt – expresses impulsive homophobia, ribbing her father Richard (Peter Barkworth) and brother Simon (Robin Davies) about their being 'gay' and jokes about how many 'fags' Simon has been with at school. Rather than questioning Emma's immature insensitivity, her mother Jane (Sheila Gish) is appalled that Emma has learned about these things *at all* in school. Teachers in PFT can sometimes be unenlightened. In Barrie Keeffe's *Gotcha* (1977), middle-class teacher Ton (Gareth Thomas) uses 'queer' as an insult to the Kid (Phil Davis) in response to the Kid's inappropriate discussion of fellow teacher Lynne's (Clare Sutcliffe) body parts. In Arthur Hopcraft's *Wednesday Love*, Gordon (Nikolas Simmonds), an outwardly trendy trainee teacher, voices homophobic attitudes, which Hopcraft narratively challenges.

In Robin Chapman's *Jumping Bean Bag* (1976), Ozzie Freemantle (David Dixon), a glam rock band's spectacularly dislikeable, amoral frontman, describes transvestism blithely as fashion, instructing a teacher to: 'Read about us in the *Melody Maker*, sir. Slag Bag, the ex-public school transvestite group... Number one in US...' In Rhys Adrian's *Buffet*, Freddie

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<sup>148</sup> Bourne, S. (2019) op. cit. 112-113.

<sup>149</sup> We do not learn David's real identity until near the end; his first alias is Henry Tobias Jones: Rolinson, D. (2005) *The Television Series: Alan Clarke*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 29.

<sup>150</sup> Earlier, the headmaster's wife Mrs Richardson (Isabel Dean) expresses the telling insight: 'We're all mediocre, or else we wouldn't be here'.

(Tony Britton) and Harold (Edward de Souza) enjoy gin ‘n’ tonics in a London railway station buffet bar; Molly (male actor Oengus MacNamara) enters, ordering a light ale, and is greeted cordially and matter-of-factly by the men. As Freddie leaves, however, their previous broadmindedness is undermined by a close-up of Harold’s slightly uncomfortable face after Molly has looked at him, which unsubtly infers his distaste at transvestism. Caryl Churchill’s Play for Tomorrow *Crimes* (1982) satirises blasé middle-class intolerance when posh-voiced murderer Jane (Sylvestra Le Touzel) discloses that mothers have a right to abort ‘queers’. In Churchill’s 2000-set dystopia, Jane conflates ‘queers’, ignorantly, with the ‘transsexual babies’ that Dr Schwartz (T.P. McKenna) is rumoured to be aborting. Via Jane’s monologue, Churchill indicates that unseen young people are challenging this illiberal authoritarianism.

Rose Tremain’s *A Room for the Winter* (1981) has well-meaning liberal intentions; its characters are all gay men, barring a black landlady Katherine (Pam Obermeyer). However, Tremain over-reaches, similarly to her central protagonist James van Stanten (Jack Shepherd), a gay South African Anti-Apartheid activist, who is writing a book analogising the Divine Right of Kings with Apartheid. At its climax, James’s forlorn, rejected lover Robert (Paul Copley) is beaten up in a ‘queer-bashing’ attack, whose prospect was heavily foreshadowed. After the attack, Robert is presented simply, and finally, as a bloodied victim, unsubtly evoking pathos: perpetuating the gay man as victim trope. A strong cast struggle against ‘a miasma of lugubriousness’, which Cooper saw as offering ‘little hope or insight’.<sup>151</sup> Cooper implicitly situates this ‘dour saga’ of ‘disillusionment and despair’ within a stale tradition of gloomy representations of gay men.<sup>152</sup> While Jack Shepherd is opposed to the essentialist casting proposed by Russell T. Davies – that only gay actors should play gay roles – he nevertheless argues that the gay South African activist and actor Antony Sher (1949-2021), who had been in the running, should have played James.<sup>153</sup> Shepherd thinks Sher would have been more suitable as James, given Sher’s exceptional acting ability *and* his greater proximity to James’s identity.

Initially, PFT represented homosexual identity as unspoken and forbidden. In John Osborne’s fantasy *The Right Prospectus* (1970), Grant’s house prefect Heffer (Christopher Witty) outlines the rules against ‘buggery’ in Grant’s house to new boy Mr Newbold

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<sup>151</sup> Church, M. (1981b) Beyond redemption, *Times*, 4 Nov, 8; Cooper, E. (1981b) Television, *Gay News*, 228, 12 Nov, 36.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Shepherd, J. (2022a) Interview with author, 12 Jan.

(George Cole). Osborne depicts a poignantly unarticulated rapport between Newbold and Partridge (Keith Skinner), which anticipates Simon Gray's subsequent obliqueness. All three of Gray's PFTs contain closeted gay or bisexual men, married to women, but whose sexuality is never explicitly voiced: Gerald (James Laurenson) in *The Man in the Sidecar* (1971) and both sets of Peter and Charles characters (Alan Bates and Dinsdale Landen) in the consecutively broadcast *Plaintiffs and Defendants* (1975) and *Two Sundays*.<sup>154</sup>

In *The Man in the Sidecar*, Gray depicts Tommy (David Collings) as a Welsh playwright, who like Tim in W. Stephen Gilbert's *Circle Line* (1971), is sexually ambiguous and poses a challenge to Edith (Gemma Jones) and Gerald's marriage. In Gray's mordant, witty narrative, Edith clearly only loves her *work* as a successful novelist; Tommy and Gerald share a deeper human connection. In the 1950s sequences of *Two Sundays*, Gray depicts two boys (Stephen Grover and Andrew Burleigh), whose relationship mirrors Charles (Alan Bates) and Peter's (Dinsdale Landen) unspoken love. While their vague, liberal Housemaster (Benjamin Whitrow) claims that friendship should run on 'proper lines', he adds: 'You must find your own way'. Charles and Peter, members of educational and publishing elites, are trapped within heterosexual marriages: a pragmatic muddle which partially enacts the 1950s teacher's 'guidance'. Bates and Landen expertly communicate the undertones of Gray's dialogue in momentary, meaningful glances which convey their deep attachment. While some viewers appreciated the play's sensitivity and its communication of dissatisfaction underneath the 'normal' surface of everyday life, more found it 'dull', unfathomable or so obscure they 'had to read the papers next day to find out what it was all about'.<sup>155</sup>

Also dramatising secrecy is John Bowen's *A Photograph*, where it is implied, cryptically, that metropolitan arts critic Michael Otway (John Stride) is having an affair with a man, while also pursuing other women, for which his wife Gillian (Stephanie Turner) ultimately gains revenge. Historical PFTs discern closeted gay lives and deep-rooted homophobia. A Dispatch Rider (Daniel Webb) in Ian McEwan's *The Imitation Game* (1980) tells Cathy (Harriet Walter), with distaste, that half of the elite Cambridge scientists at Bletchley are 'you know...': figuring homosexuality as deviant. In Trevor Griffiths's *Country* (1981), the bisexual Philip Carlion (James Fox) assents to his mother Lady Carlion's (Wendy Hiller) aghast proclamation that he is a 'bugger [if] not exclusively'. Narratively, Griffiths shows

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<sup>154</sup> Casting Laurenson may have signified Gerald's sexuality, given his role in the recent *Edward II*.

<sup>155</sup> BBC ARD (1975) *Audience Research Report – Play for Today: Two Sundays*, 7 Nov, VR/75/606. This oblivious response to Gray's subtlety demonstrates the playwright Arne's point in *Penda's Fen* that audiences had lost the 'sight, and will, to see what is really going on'.

Carlion conforming by suppressing this side of his identity: at the end, he gets married and takes charge of his father's brewery business – therein prioritising his family and upper-class allegiances. However, Howes read it as inevitable that Philip's boyfriend Nikki will be incorporated into his new life.<sup>156</sup>

Gradually, PFTs moved towards depicting openly gay protagonists. David Rudkin's *Penda's Fen* (1974) features an overt, complex, homosexual self-expression. Stephen Franklin's (Spencer Banks) headmaster (John Richmond) utterly fails to comprehend Stephen, pigeonholing his development as a 'hankering' to join his 'generation's underside' and conservatively bemoaning his loss of 'national pride'. This follows teacher Cooke's (Ivor Roberts) reprimand of Stephen as a rebellious 'Non-cooperative', for renegeing on his military apprenticeship. In Stephen's rite of passage, he learns, through experience, to reject the middle-class conservatism of his school and his adoptive parents, symbolised in stark, non-naturalistic terms by *The Man* (Ray Gatenby) and *The Lady* (Joan Scott).<sup>157</sup>

Inspired by the free-thinking left-wing playwright Mr Arne (Ian Hogg), Mrs Arne (Jennie Heslewood) and Sir Edward Elgar's (Graham Leaman) visitation, Stephen begins to understand his plural identities, which include being gay. Rudkin, aided by Alan Clarke's visceral direction, conveys Stephen finding the strength to change his life by listening to the Arnes, instead of his teachers and parents. They are a childless couple, aiming to adopt, who possess considerably greater insight, open-mindedness and compassion than Stephen's adoptive parents. The kindly Mrs Arne tells Stephen that homosexuals make very good fathers, showing her intuition regarding his sexuality. Learning of his own adoption, Stephen realises he needs to find his own voice and perspective; he transcends his earlier callow belief in 'blood and soil', instead identifying with an anarchic paganism. Forsaking his conservative Christianity, Stephen is sexually attracted to Joel (Ron Smerczak). Stephen's powerfully awakened sexual desire, however nascent and unconsummated, conveys how he is now guided by his feelings.

In *Wednesday Love*, Arthur Hopcraft depicts Billy's Club in Manchester, ran by Billy (Clifford Kershaw), as an urban space where people with different sexualities are accepted.<sup>158</sup> It is ambiguous whether Ph.D. student Chris (Simon Rouse) and closeted gay

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<sup>156</sup> Howes, K. (1994) *Broadcasting It: An Encyclopaedia of Homosexuality on Film, Radio and TV in the UK, 1923-1993*. London: Cassell, 151. Nikki is alluded to, but does not appear in, *Country*.

<sup>157</sup> *The Lady* is another of PFT's evocations of Mary Whitehouse, and is, by far, the most serious and disturbing.

<sup>158</sup> With its non-judgemental credo, Billy's Club is a warm, even Utopian, democratic institution, similarly rambunctious, but more inclusive, than the local pub in Welland's *Kisses at Fifty* (1973) (*KAF*).

Councillor Terry Priestley (Fred Gaunt) have sex, but Gordon mocks Terry covertly, and his bisexual friend Chris overtly. However, Chris gets the last word, indicting Gordon's baseness and prejudice: 'All you want is a compliant doll to fondle while you're watching *Match of the Day* on your colour TV set...' Gordon has just ridiculed Chris for going off with the married, 34 year-old Jean (Lois Daine), but Hopcraft's ambiguously hopeful ending holds out the possibility that Chris and Jean's relationship might last longer than Gordon's three-month forecast. Hopcraft, himself a bisexual, shows that Billy's Club is a more educative and welcoming environment than the classrooms where people like Gordon will teach in the future.<sup>159</sup> Or, indeed, contemporary newspaper columns: in a rare incidence of a TV critic using overtly homophobic language about a PFT, Hazel Holt refers to Terry as 'bent'.<sup>160</sup>

*Wednesday Love* anticipates 1979-84 PFTs where societal prejudice remains, but gay or transsexual people are an emergent social presence, openly being themselves and more normalised within society. In Dusty Hughes's *Commitments*, Buffo (Bryan Coleman) is an alcoholic and retired civil servant and an integral sardonic presence in a household of left-wing Trotskyite activists. While Buffo's partner – who, like Nikki in *Country*, never appears on-screen – leaves him in a clichéd rendition of gay relationships' transience, Buffo has a lengthy naturalistic speech about his lifelong experience of queer-bashing: this sensitively advances on its depiction in *A Room for the Winter*. By the end, Buffo's outlook of disengaged left-wing anarchism – which he voices, pithily, as the TV set relays results of the February 1974 general election – is signified as an earthy, wise corrective to some of his flatmates' zeal. Howes admires the play's affectionate humanism and how Buffo has learned about politics from life, not manifestos.<sup>161</sup>

Gay writer James Andrew Hall's *Coming Out* marked a complicated watershed for PFT.<sup>162</sup> Lewis Duncan (Anton Rodgers) is a complex protagonist, seemingly part of normative bourgeois culture. Hall breaks ground by depicting Lewis sharing a bed and conversing with a black male prostitute Polo (Ben Ellison). *Coming Out* is prone to stereotyping, though is nevertheless a compelling drama; it demonstrated progress by representing a diverse range of openly gay men – and for bluntly identifying homophobia as a problem, building on Welland's and Hopcraft's antecedents. However, *Coming Out*'s RI of 57

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<sup>159</sup> Atkin, R. (2004) Obituary: Arthur Hopcraft, *Guardian*, 26 Nov [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2004/nov/26/football.guardianobituaries> [accessed: 08/02/2022].

<sup>160</sup> Holt, H. (1975) Author wrote wrong play, *Television Today*, 15 May, 14.

<sup>161</sup> Howes (1994) op. cit. 136.

<sup>162</sup> Bourne, S. (2019) op. cit. 164.

betokened a ‘markedly divided response’ among viewers.<sup>163</sup> In a polemical attack, which he stands by to this day, Keith Howes felt that Gerald’s (Richard Pearson) character had made Gay liberation ‘appear ludicrous’ and that the play trivialised ‘queer-bashing’, as well as being a retrograde ‘problem’ play with a desolate ending.<sup>164</sup> *Gay News*’ letters page was dominated for several issues by divided reactions to Howes’s polemic; when repeated in 1980, John Russell Taylor gave nuanced approval to Hall’s play for how it showed men kissing and in bed together.<sup>165</sup> Showing intersectional solidarity with Howes’s arguments, Ruth Wallsgrove of *Spare Rib* decried its depiction of ‘miserable’ gay men and how Anton Rodgers, appearing on *Tonight* (1979) directly after *Coming Out*, had made bigoted and patronising comments about gay people *and* ‘the coloured [sic] situation’.<sup>166</sup>

Leonard Preston’s *TGATK* showed a greater societal acceptance and integration. This naturalistic semi-musical goes even further than other 1979-82 plays in presenting gay men, unremarkably, as part of contemporary British life. Peter Lester (Leonard Preston) and Jimmy Walker (John Duttine) face and overcome difficulties in their relationship: Preston’s upbeat ending advances on *Coming Out*’s gloom in how their renewed love shows a gay relationship as lasting, not transient. Howes criticised *TGATK*’s sanitisation: Jimmy and Peter share their doorstep kiss for just two seconds, though he admires how it concludes with a ‘slight crack’ in Peter’s cynical ‘permafrost’.<sup>167</sup> In its positive, but un-idealised, depictions, *TGATK* builds towards Stewart’s vital *Two Of Us* and prefigures how TV soap operas, led by *EastEnders*, would incorporate gay men.<sup>168</sup>

### 5.3.3. ‘Our lass has had more black eyes than wage packets’<sup>169</sup>: Gender

This gazetteer analyses how PFT represents men and women, detailing significantly recurrent representations in PFT of male violence, alongside bodily objectification of women via images within the *mise-en-scène* – photographic pin-ups, Page Three ‘girls’ and dolls. It also perceives a persistent strain of socialist feminism within PFTs broadly associable with second-wave radical feminism, alongside an emergent liberal feminism in the early 1980s.

<sup>163</sup> BBC ARD (1979) *Audience Research Report – Play for Today: Coming Out*, n.d., VR/79/171.

<sup>164</sup> Howes, K. (1979a) *Play for Today?* *Gay News*, 165, 19 Apr, 30; Howes (2020) op. cit.

<sup>165</sup> Various (1979) *Letters*, *Gay News*, 166, 167 & 168, 3 May, 17 May & 31 May, 12, 16, 39; Taylor, J.R. (1980) *Suffering from good intentions*, *Gay News*, 194, 26 Jun, 19.

<sup>166</sup> Wallsgrove, R. (1979) *TV*, *Spare Rib*, June 37-38.

<sup>167</sup> Howes (1994) op. cit. 322-323.

<sup>168</sup> While laudable, *TGATK* is undoubtedly blander dramatically than *The Other Woman* or *Coming Out*.

<sup>169</sup> Line spoken by Moffa (Paul Shane), to which Mrs Oxfam (Liz Smith) retorts, powerlessly: ‘Men...’ in: PFT *Keep an Eye on Albert* (1975).

While British TV *was* more open to women than theatres were in the Elizabethan era, Virginia Woolf's claim that, had Shakespeare had an equally talented sister, she would not have been able to establish herself as a professional dramatist is *partially* true of PFT.<sup>170</sup> Only 11.7% of PFTs were written by women; women directors were even more marginal, directing only 4.4%.<sup>171</sup> Women producers and designers were somewhat better represented – 23.1% and 18.5%, respectively – Irene Shubik and Margaret Matheson were uniquely powerful women producers; Susan Spence (15 credits) compares to PFT's most-credited designers Richard Henry (17) and Derek Dodd (12). Director Derek Lister's claim that the BBC Plays department was a 'meritocracy' is partially supported by the feelings of many BBC women workers (see Appendix 8).<sup>172</sup>

While PFT showed some improvement in behind-the-camera representation, compared with TWP – women directors were up 1.7%, women writers 2.6% and producers 7.5% – this was slow progress: the BBC was yet to adopt positive discrimination measures to redress entrenched imbalances. However, PFT demonstrated significant advances during 1977-82, when Jane Howell, Fiona Cumming, Carol Wiseman and Moira Armstrong directed several notable plays and *multiple* women writers were employed *in each series*, reaching a height in 1981-82 of 34.1% of writers employed. However, writers like Rachel Billington, Carol Bunyan and Marcella Evaristi received fewer recommissions than canonised male creators like Leigh, Potter and Rosenthal.

Compared with Woolf's perception of exclusionary Elizabethan theatre, women *were* prominent in PFT's casts.<sup>173</sup> However, female performers' on-screen presence *was* overshadowed by that of male performers: PFT involved 1,701 women and 3,234 men, 34.5% and 65.5%, respectively.<sup>174</sup> Jacmel Dent, AFM on eleven PFTs (1979-84), felt irked regularly throughout the 1970s-90s by male directors' casting of extras: giving three out of four parts to men, when there was 'no obvious need for a preference for one sex over the other'.<sup>175</sup> Of 294 PFTs, 231 featured majority-male casts, 16 had gender parity and 47 had majority-female casts. 56 PFTs had casts with 80% male actors or higher, while just *one* PFT – *Ladies* (1980) – showed the reverse.<sup>176</sup> This situation is defensible on grounds of

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<sup>170</sup> Woolf op. cit. 48-58.

<sup>171</sup> See also: Ball, V. (2022) Women Writers and Writing Women into Histories of Play for Today, *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, (19)2, 150-172.

<sup>172</sup> Lister, D. (2021) Interview with author, 7 Jun.

<sup>173</sup> Woolf op. cit. 49.

<sup>174</sup> This information on all 294 PFTs utilises on-screen credits, *Radio Times* credits, camera scripts and, in some cases, includes on-screen appearances by musicians; the data-set needs a little refining.

<sup>175</sup> Dent, J. (2021b) Email to the author, 27 Jul.

<sup>176</sup> Eight PFTs do not credit *any* women actors: *Billy's Last Stand* (1971), *Pal* (1971), *A Life is For Ever*, *For Sylvia*, or *the Air Show* (1973), *The Elephants' Graveyard* (1976), *Comedians*, *Protest* (1981) and *Atlantis*.

verisimilitude. Clearly, the workplaces, comedy evening classes, public houses or prisons in PFTs by Peter Terson, Tom Hadaway, Trevor Griffiths, Bill Bryden and Tony Parker were, in real life, predominantly male spaces that viewers would recognise. However, this shows just how well-represented working-class men were by PFT, which, in its earlier years, created a self-fulfilling prophecy by recommissioning successful dramatists who, barring Jones and Lethbridge, were largely male.

According to *Radio Times* billings, women had 35% of the top three roles in PFTs. Particular statistical improvements were evident in PFT's 1974-75, 1977-78 and 1981-82 series, when top-billed actors including Susan Littler, Elizabeth Spriggs, Eileen McCallum, Pauline Quirke, Liz Smith, Alison Steadman, Lesley Dunlop, Cheryl Hall, Christine Hargreaves, Thora Hird, Frances Tomelty, Jane Freeman, Paula Wilcox, Susan Tracy, Barbara Flynn, Rosemary Martin and Julie Walters gave varied and powerful performances. These women actors' centrality is reflected in how many of them had previously appeared in the strand – for instance, Tracy and Hargreaves – and were subsequently recast in other PFTs.

A statistically typical PFT, Dennis Potter's *Only Make Believe* (1973) – 40% female cast, a third of the top-billed roles – demonstrates PFT's sporadic androcentric tendency. In other PFTs, Potter wrote compelling, moving roles for women.<sup>177</sup> However, in *Only Make Believe*, Sandra George (Georgina Hale) is a vapid, timid secretary; the play is myopically centred on her boss, the writer Christopher Hudson (Keith Barron). As Clive James argued, Sandra herself 'hadn't been allowed to exist'.<sup>178</sup>

PFT depicts marriage as a troubled institution: as Chapter 4 found, unhappily married people regularly commit infidelity in newly permissive Britain. Even Stephen Lowe's *Cries*, which shows a married couple – Andy (Paul Copley) and Jill (Anita Carey) – enjoying loving consensual sex, subsequently portrays them encountering difficulties, due to Andy's enforced unemployment, though the relationship revives when their new-born child arrives. Many PFTs show husbands being cruel, withdrawn or habitually absent: *Just Your Luck* (1972), *The Bouncing Boy*, *Hard Labour*, *Baby Blues*, *Wednesday Love*, *The Good Time Girls* (1981), *Baby Talk* (1981) and *Only Children* (1984).<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> For Christine Hargreaves as Cynthia in *Angels Are So Few* (1970) and Angharad Rees as Lucy in *Joe's Ark* (1974).

<sup>178</sup> James, C. (1973b) Potter's wheels within wheels, *Observer*, 18 Feb, 35. James provides a similar, if less pointed, analysis of *DAIS*, noting how 'most of the subtler touches' came from actor Angela Down rather than Wood's script: James, C. (1977a) Matter of rape, *Observer*, 30 Jan, 30.

<sup>179</sup> *KAF* conveys an accepting, nuanced attitude to Harry's adultery, which is immediately in the open.

PfTs portray domestic violence perpetrated by a cross-class range of men against women or children: *The Lie* (1970), *Just Your Luck*, *Moss*, *Keep an Eye on Albert*, *Victims of Apartheid*, *Don't Be Silly* (1979), *Billy*, *United Kingdom* (1981), *Too Late to Talk to Billy* (1982), *Rainy Day Women* (1984), *It Could Happen to Anybody* (1984) and *TAMSE*.<sup>180</sup> In *Edna*, *The Inebriate Woman* (1971) (*Edna*), *Taking Leave* (1974), *Not for the Likes of Us* (1980) and *EGAPL*, male violence lingers in women's memories, while characters in *Wednesday Love*, *Love on a Gunboat* and *WLS* recount its bleakly everyday nature.<sup>181</sup>

Less sensitively, male playwright Charles Wood's blasé comedy *DAIS* satirised suburban Bristolians' self-centred responses to Daphne (Angela Down) being raped in her own home. Hilary's neighbour Louise's (Heather Canning) call to suppress news of the incident, to protect local house prices, reveals middle-class selfishness. Wood's women characters are *uniformly* insensitive. Fatally, the opening rape is depicted in a detached, casually sensationalist manner. Mary Whitehouse's invective against Wood's play as a 'tasteless caricature', with an 'unnecessarily explicit' rape scene was in rare accordance with enlightened radical feminist opinion.<sup>182</sup>

Male PfT writers, including Christopher Bigsby, Malcolm Bradbury, Ian McEwan and Nigel Williams wrote rich parts for women actors, whom devisers Blair, Leigh and Jim Allen granted autonomy. To research playing Pauline in *The Spongers* (1978), Christine Hargreaves lived in the Greater Manchester community. Williams's *Baby Talk* centres on a middle-class couple unready for parenthood, anticipating Judy Forrest's *FED Only Children*, where Jill (Charlotte Cornwell) is helped by working-class mums and her gay friend Dolly (Eric Deacon). *Baby Talk* contains domestic violence, but unlike *DAIS*'s unsettlingly languid rape scene, director Derek Lister cuts away when the struggling Mary (Susan Littler) hits her child. *Baby Talk* avoids the bleak endings of *Baby Blues* and the societal tragedy *The Spongers*; Mary Whitehouse attacked the former for showing a caesarean birth.<sup>183</sup> A viewer echoed worldlier responses to *UTJ* in mocking this absurd

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<sup>180</sup> In *Moss*, Philip (John Lyons) beating his wife Marlene (Jennie Stoller) is associated with Philip's wider greed and acquisitive entitlement.

<sup>181</sup> In Rita May's *EGAPL*, Ron Ollershaw (Ron Delta) recounts how his dad beat him up, to avert his becoming a 'poof': emphasising how male violence discriminates against difference. *WTBB* breaks with narrative expectation in depicting female violence, reflecting the smaller number of women who are violent towards their children.

<sup>182</sup> Whitehouse, M. (1977) Letter to Shaun Sutton, 29 Jan. BBC WAC, R/78/2348. In reply, BBC Head of Drama Shaun Sutton accepted that, while they had to show that the rape had taken place, there was 'perhaps one explicit shot too many', though he supported Wood's characterisations of Louise and Hilary, arguing they were types of women he had met: Sutton, S. (1977) Letter to Mary Whitehouse, 1 Feb. BBC WAC, R/78/2348.

<sup>183</sup> Anon (1973) BBC baby play has Mary fuming, *Daily Mail*, 8 Dec, 8.

over-reaction: ‘If Mrs Mary Whitehouse can see the obscenity even in the birth of a baby, I suggest it is time she took stock of her own mind and outlook’.<sup>184</sup>

In *Comedians*, Eddie Waters censures Gethin for telling a joke which ‘hates women’. More often, PfT furthered *covert* feminist critiques which challenged the masculine bias of workplaces, implicitly including those in TV. Jacmel Dent mentions how, during her Production Manager training course in Acton, the male OB crew had explicit ‘tit’ pictures stuck all over the walls alongside the monitors; Dent recounts achieving a feminist victory in getting *Playboy* pictures forbidden in scanners.<sup>185</sup> Dent notes how production designers would sometimes encode ‘silent messages through the design of a set or location’.<sup>186</sup> Dressing the set, with images of women pin-ups, was sometimes an attempt to ‘bolster up a weak text’, via inserting deliberate critique of masculine workspaces.<sup>187</sup>

A leitmotif of women’s bodily objectification in everyday environments is present in at least 20 PfTs – more than once a series. Here, representations of naked women appear within the *mise-en-scène*, including pin-up images attached to walls, Page Three ‘girls’ in newspapers and dolls resembling naked women. In male-authored PfTs, such elements featured within verisimilar set design, presenting male-dominated spaces recognisable to viewers – who might have identified this as critical set-dressing. Across female-authored PfTs, objectification was often critiqued trenchantly.

At least nine PfTs (1970-83) feature pin-up images on the walls of male manual workplaces, including *The Hallelujah Handshake*, *Edna*, *Shutdown*, *The Bevellers* (1974), *A Touch of the Tiny Hacketts* (1978), *Just A Boys’ Game* (1979), *A Sudden Wrench* (1982) and *Atlantis*. Alongside other pin-ups, a Salford taxi firm’s office in *Hard Labour* has a local business’s calendar with a naked lady posing with a tuba. In Barry Hines’s *The Price of Coal* (1977), an all-male committee joke that, due to a planned royal visit to their South Yorkshire pit, they will have to shift their wall calendar, which visibly displays a naked woman. This characteristic jocularly avoids challenging the viewer’s identification with the masculine working-class world depicted.

Contrastingly, in *Light*, writer Tony Perrin, a persistent critic of trade union practices, depicts the Electrical Trades Union officials’ quarters with two pin-up images explicitly behind the bullying union boss Edge. In G.F. Newman’s *Billy*, on a prison cell noticeboard,

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<sup>184</sup> BBC ARD (1965) *Audience Research Report: The Wednesday Play: Up the Junction*, 7 Dec, VR/65/619; Steed, R. (1973) Oh, baby, *Daily Mail*, 14 Dec, 25.

<sup>185</sup> Dent (2021b) op. cit.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid. Dent adds that other production staff could also offer creative input, which collegiate directors, like Richard Eyre, would listen to and sometimes incorporate: Dent, J. (2022) Email to author, 24 Aug.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

pinned passport photos of loved ones are spatially dominated by three large pin-up images of naked women (see Figure 5.4). These images are either unmentioned or referenced jokily by men, as in *The Price of Coal*, *Billy* and *Atlantis*. In Perrin's *Shutdown*, the tragic epileptic Bernie reclaims his explicit pin-up from his locker as he leaves his job and pockets it (see Figure 5.1). Men value these cut-out icons; their placement in the workplace is an unspoken participation in a male domain and game which excludes women. In Paula Milne's *A Sudden Wrench*, Christine (Rosemary Martin) achieves workplace success in the building site on her own terms. In an upbeat ending, Christine's refusal to join the lads in a game of cards in their rest-room hut where such images are present – alongside Health and Safety notices – establishes her feminist independence (see Figure 5.6). Seán Day-Lewis saw this as being of its early 1980s moment in replacing plays 'in which women only existed in relation to men'; in Milne's play, 'women emerged as the strong and more interesting sex', improving significantly on Mike Leigh's recent *Home Sweet Home* (1982).<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Day-Lewis, S. (1998) *Talk of Drama: Views of the Television Dramatist Now and Then*. Luton: University of Luton Press, 108-109.



Figures 5.1-5.6. Screen-shots – 5.1: Shutdown, 55:50, 5.2: A Touch of the Tiny Hacketts, 33:00, 5.3: Just A Boys' Game, 30:08, 5.4: Billy, 44:11, 5.5: Atlantis, 25:32 & 5.6: A Sudden Wrench, 56:10.

PfT writers generally critiqued images of Page Three 'girls' more: reflecting left-wing attitudes about their control and circulation via a tabloid press which widely disseminates a false consciousness, not entirely distinguishable from how men situate pin-ups in their workspaces. PfT's representations fit Rebecca Loncraine's perception that Page Three assumed a prurient populism, diverging from the *Sun's* initially politically progressive permissive populism in 1969 – when *male* nude photos were as common and the nudity was 'zesty, healthy, naturist and liberated', rather than 'erotic and naughty', as in the

1980s.<sup>189</sup> The old buffer who fawns over Page Three in Stewart Parker's *The Kamikaze Ground Staff Reunion Dinner* (1981) is clearly a lecherous fool. In *The Silly Season* (1982), while art students Alastair (Iain Lauchlan) and Dennis (Pierce Brosnan) talk in the pub, Alastair decries Page Three images as enforcing conformism, subduing males from left-wing consciousness, though Dennis claims they are just 'a bit of harmless tit'. Alastair's girlfriend Lesley (Frances Low) disagrees with Dennis, but is pointedly excluded and talked over. This acute exchange is undermined later by a scene where Lesley poses nude for Alastair to paint her, which is uncomfortably not critiqued.

In contrast, Carol Bunyan's *Sorry* clearly shows how men's game of objectifying women generates male violence. Handyman Terry (Nicholas Ball) offers to put up a calendar with images of naked women to 'brighten up' Kate (Meg Davies) and June's (June Brown) office workspace. Neither woman approves: June would prefer something more innocuous; Kate voices feminist criticisms of how these images cheapen and degrade women and turn sex into a joke (see Figure 5.7). This causes Terry to claim Kate is 'uptight'; echoing the *Sun*'s 'humourless-feminists' discourse. There ensues a horrifying scenario where Terry traps Kate in his bland, sophisticated bachelor flat against her will and commits sexual assault.



Figures 5.7-5.8. Screen-shots – 5.7: *Sorry*, 13:39 & 5.8: *Angels Are So Few*, 40:44.

Unusually, *Angels Are So Few* features a woman responding to images: bored housewife Cynthia flicks through an edition of *Vogue* (see Figure 5.8). Close-ups evoke her perspective looking at adverts featuring women, who, unlike those in all other images discussed thus far, are clothed: indicating *Vogue*'s appeal to a female readership. The last has a caption, 'Cynthia isn't wearing panties', featuring a glamorous looking woman holding a small dog and dressed in a hooded white dressing-gown; her long, uncovered

<sup>189</sup> Loncraine, R. (2007) Bosom of the nation: Page Three in the 1970s and 1980s, in: M. Gorji (ed.) *Rude Britannia*. London: Routledge: 96-111.

legs are visible. Ironically – the model shares her name – Cynthia mutters ‘dirty bitch...’ Hargreaves’s expressions suggest her newfound interest in sexual pleasure: which breaks with the trope of puritanical women and pleasure-seeking men.<sup>190</sup>

Male and female writers critiqued sexualised dolls. In Brian Glover’s *Keep an Eye on Albert*, John (Kenneth MacDonald) and Albert (Derrick O’Connor) bring a life-size inflatable sex doll resembling a woman into a South Yorkshire pit village pub. In the tap-room, the diminutive ‘Jab’ Bowen (Dickie Arnold) drunkenly engages in a mock boxing match with the doll, which Albert holds (see Figure 5.9). While landlady Glenda (Susan Tracy) is amused, the middle-class teacher Susan (Judy Liebert) tells landlord Terry (David Daker) – who she is flirting with – that he is wasted on ‘that lot’, amid sounds of raucous horseplay. Nude images are used in *The Adventures of Frank – Part One* (1980) to evoke the permissiveness of Soho; a man clutching an inflatable sex doll sings to camera, satirically, about their function: ‘for your fantasies of rape’ (see Figure 5.10).



Figures 5.9-5.12. Screen-shots – 5.9: *Keep an Eye on Albert*, 42:20, 5.10: *The Adventures of Frank – Part One*, 17:55, 5.11: *Moving on the Edge*, 47:31 & 5.12: *Sunset Across the Bay*, 10:25.

<sup>190</sup> Women’s pleasure is central in two later PFTs: Vivian (Susan Littler) in *Spend, Spend, Spend* (1977) reflects on her experiences of it, while Connie (Pam St Clement) in *Not for the Likes of Us* (1980) yearns for it.

In Rose Tremain's *Moving on the Edge* (1984), the middle-class Camilla (Eleanor Bron) fails to commit adultery with old flame Liam (T.P. McKenna) to escape her dead suburban marriage with Michael (Gary Raymond). Taking a cab home, she notices that the driver (Stewart Harwood) has a miniature naked lady doll hanging from his rear-view mirror. As he talks *at* Camilla, the camera conveys her subjectivity by showing several close-ups of the swinging doll (see Figure 5.11). Camilla refuses to talk and gets out early, in a sequence that identifies male sex-obsession and degrading of women as a problem. Tremain discerns society's coarsening through such everyday manifestations, which evokes Dad's (Harry Markham) recollections in Alan Bennett's *Sunset Across the Bay* (1975) of how 'folk used to think those statues' – female nude nymphs in Leeds' City Square – 'right rude' (see Figure 5.12).

The women textiles workers in Colin Welland's *Leeds United!* display a collective socialist consciousness more overt than that in Dunn and Garnett's *UTJ*. Watson Gould's *The Other Woman* (1976) portrays lesbian protagonist Kim's (Jane Lapotaire) socialist feminist views as an alternative to militaristic, violent masculine values.<sup>191</sup> However, Kim's actions undermine her laudable rhetoric: she rapes Nicki (Lynne Frederick) and violently shakes and shouts in child Lois's (Martyn West) face, when he asks to play with toy guns. In the pub, Kim's closest friend, Rose (Rosalind Adams), a sex worker, tells her: 'You're so bloody proud of being a woman you sometimes forget to be human...'<sup>192</sup> Rose's wise socialist humanism anticipates that of Stevie (Deborah Fallender) in *Come the Revolution* and Cecilia Plasche (Lynda Marchal) in *Coming Out*, who vocally challenges sexist language use.<sup>193</sup>

Following the articulate, self-declared 'socialist' feminist Kate in *Sorry*, Rosemary Davies's *No Visible Scar* (1981) and Frances Galleymore's *A Mother Like Him* (1982) show feminist consciousness as embattled and vital. In Davies's play, the nurse Margaret Hanson (Barbara Flynn) is detained and tortured in a South American dictatorship – resembling Pinochet's Chile – for having treated a known revolutionary. When released, Margaret tells the British press that this male-led torture included sexual violence. Director Moira Armstrong conveys Margaret's experience of the torture with hard-hitting, but

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<sup>191</sup> Gould's play is especially notable, given how PFT, like wider TV, generally lacked representations of lesbian experience: Woolley op. cit.

<sup>192</sup> Rose's humanistic words imply that Kim is overly essentialist in her identity politics, supporting Nicki's earlier perception that Kim is actually more liberal than socialist, as she *acts* impulsively and individualistically.

<sup>193</sup> Lynda Marchal is the stage name of writer Lynda La Plante, who trained at RADA and had a range of stage roles with the RSC and TV roles for BBC and ITV before her breakthrough as a writer with *Widows* (1983-85).

sparingly brief, sequences.<sup>194</sup> When recuperating with her suburban middle-class family, her brother David (Simon Jones) recounts their childhood holiday visit to a Chamber of Horrors waxworks: one exhibit, behind a velvet curtain, was the ‘Butcher’s Hook of Algiers’, with a half-naked woman swinging from it. David, inexplicably, repeats his cruel childish taunt to his sister: ‘frightened of the hook!’ Margaret clearly feels sick, recalling this grotesque normalisation of violence against women as ‘entertainment’ (see Figure 5.13). Smug, RP-accented David is vastly insensitive given Margaret’s recent experiences.



Figures 5.13-5.14: Screen-shots – 5.13: Margaret in *No Visible Scar*, 46:05 & 5.14: Feminist wall graffiti in *A Mother Like Him*, 03:19.

At the end, Barbara Flynn conveys Margaret’s development of political consciousness: she appears on a TV discussion programme, having become an activist, and forcefully argues the moral feminist case for human rights and against torture. Symbolically rebuking certain actual BBC discussion programmes, the impassioned Margaret outshines her fellow panellist, the journalist Patrick Witney (William Gaunt), who makes relativistic and pragmatic arguments.<sup>195</sup> Flynn conveys the toughness and love that she later showed when playing the schoolteacher and activist Jill Swinburne in Alan Plater’s *Beiderbecke* trilogy (1985-88).

Flynn also appears in Galleymore’s play, which opens with a gang of youths encircling a hapless policeman (Nicholas Lyndhurst) on a patch of urban wasteland. This urban anomie is followed with a shot centring on graffiti, which explicitly cites the second-wave feminist Reclaim the Night campaign against male violence (see Figure 5.14). Galleymore centres on young gang member Tommy (Perry Fenwick), trying but failing, to foster-parent his

<sup>194</sup> Armstrong also directed Peter Ransley’s powerful *Minor Complications* (1980), which exceeded even this chapter’s final case-study in its impressionistic, raw evocation of Kay’s (Paola Dionisotti) hospital experience of medical negligence in an NHS hospital.

<sup>195</sup> Witney’s arguments resemble those that Alexander Solzhenitsyn condemns in the play’s coda, an extract from the Russian dissident writer’s interview on *Panorama* (1976).

four younger siblings on a working-class Islington council estate. Social worker Jill (Barbara Flynn) has a conscience and strength mostly absent in the men, but *her* lack of presence – due to the Thatcher government’s cuts to welfare provision – impacts negatively on the family, and Galleymore’s final note of hope feels highly provisional.

Several 1979-82 PFTs depict an emergent liberal feminism, related to individualist neoliberal cultural trends, though these, including two of Chapter 4’s case-studies, advanced *socially* liberal perspectives opposed to Thatcher’s ‘Victorian Values’. Carol Bunyan’s FED *Ladies* foregrounds wise retail workers, including Lorney (Rosa Roberts), who criticises how body image obsession undermines ‘female liberation’, while the hedonistic, intuitive Sharon (Anita Carey) cares for Miriam (Patsy Rowlands) after her miscarriage. Janey Preger’s irreverent *Under the Skin* (1982) deemphasises class and satirises radical feminists. In Milne’s aforementioned *A Sudden Wrench*, the exemplary Christine conquers male workspaces, though she, her husband Terry (Dave Hill) and children learn and evolve together. *Eve Set the Balls of Corruption Rolling* (1982), analysed later as a case-study, reflects liberal feminist PFT at its pleasurable zenith.

#### 5.3.4. Class

The danger of realism is that whatever sounds like the language of ordinary people will always, in a thoughtless way, be taken to be commonplace [...] in a snobbish way. In England those accents are thought the ugliest which are identified with the poorest people (Barry Reckord).<sup>196</sup>

As Chapter 4 found, PFT shifted to, and then from, representing the North of England; increasing its Scottish, Northern Irish and overseas coverage, while a steady, small-majority had London or South East settings. From 1970-84, there was a decline in rural settings, while urban and suburban locales increased. In 1970-71, 9.5% of PFTs were set in geographically indistinct, fee-charging public schools, whereas precisely no 1976-77 and 1984 PFTs had such settings – which implies a shift from elite to democratic representation.<sup>197</sup> Table 5.1 bears this out, showing a decline in upper-class representation and increases in working-class and middle-class milieux. Like Chapter 3, this data is assembled from the start, middle and end chronological points in PFT’s history.

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<sup>196</sup> Reckord in: Brewster, Y. (ed.) (2010) *For the Reckord: A Collection of Three Plays by Barry Reckord*. London: Oberon Books, 77-78.

<sup>197</sup> Accents in public-school-set PFTs *infer* Southern settings, but this cannot be definitively proved.

**Table 5.1. Simplified average of class representation per sample series<sup>198</sup>**

Series	Upper-class	Middle-class	Working-class
<b>1 (1970-71)</b>	1.5 (7.1%)	9.5 (45.2%)	10 (47.6%)
<b>7 (1976-77)</b>	0 (0.0%)	7 (41.2%)	10 (58.8%)
<b>15 (1984)</b>	0 (0.0%)	9 (60.0%)	6 (40.0%)
<b>Average (series 1, 7 &amp; 15)</b>	<b>1.5</b> <b>(2.8%)</b>	<b>25.5</b> <b>(48.1%)</b>	<b>26</b> <b>(49.1%)</b>

PfT rarely simply presented classes as siloes, it regularly depicted different groups and individuals interacting: see *Hearts and Flowers* (1970), *A Photograph* (1977) and *The Cry* (1984). Some PfTs counted in Table 5.1 as middle-class are more complicated, like *The Country Party* (1977). This centres on an affluent Surrey family, yet, in its subplot, restaurateur Richard Elkinson's working-class staff pilfer from him. Table 5.2 shows a more detailed breakdown.<sup>199</sup>

**Table 5.2. Predominant class composition of PfT characters**

Series #	Upper-class	Upper-class (with working-class)	Middle-class	Middle-class (with working-class)	Working-class (with middle-class)	Working-class (including underclass)
<b>1 (1970-71)</b>	1 (4.8%)	1 (4.8%)	8 (38.1%)	2 (9.5%)	1 (4.8%)	8 (38.1%)
<b>7 (1976-77)</b>	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (29.4%)	4 (23.5%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (47.1%)
<b>15 (1984)</b>	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (46.7%)	3 (20.0%)	1 (6.7%)	4 (26.7%)

<sup>198</sup> Those with notably mixed class representation are counted as half each, e.g. *Under the Hammer* (1984).

<sup>199</sup> The formerly working-class Greenock family in *It Could Happen to Anybody* is best described as underclass.

<b>Average (series 1, 7 &amp; 15)</b>	<b>1 (1.9%)</b>	<b>1 (1.9%)</b>	<b>20 (37.7%)</b>	<b>9 (17.0%)</b>	<b>2 (3.8%)</b>	<b>20 (37.7%)</b>
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1976-77 was a high-point in PFT's working-class representation, led by producers David Rose, Kenith Trodd and Graeme McDonald. This series' proportion of working-class representation was only 5% below the UK's estimated working-class population (see Chapter 3). However, by 1984, there was a marked gravitation towards middle-class representation in virtually all producers' output *except* Michael Wearing, Chris Parr and Bob McIntosh. Upper-class representation was rare.<sup>200</sup>

*Z for Zachariah* and *Rainy Day Women* (both 1984) centred on identifiable, besieged middle-class protagonists, and the final PFT *TAMSE* presents the working-class title-character Stella Estelle (Elaine Lordan) empathetically as a victim, who finally resists, economic exploitation by her unemployed father. A wider master-plot of inadequate fathers runs throughout the last four PFTs, which *all* include working- and middle-class dads who are either sectarian, violent or who desert their families. Over time, PFT moved towards bleaker representations of working-class groups and individuals. This pattern is clear in the move from the collective, if doomed, action of the workers in early PFTs like *Stocker's Copper* to the worldly humour and insight shown by many characters in the mid-period *Your Man from Six Counties*, to the aforementioned bad fathers, the sinister Dennis Ibbetson (Ian Hogg) and the unreconstructed Jake (Mick Ford) in 1984 PFTs. Late PFT's feminist turn is marked in how the most compassionate characters in series 15 are women: Susan King in *King*, the mums' support-group in *Only Children*, Lorna and Mavis, the middle-class addition to the Martin family, in *A Coming to Terms for Billy* (1984) (see Chapter 4).

*Housewives' Choice* illuminates Chapter 3's findings that PFT in 1975 catered more to working-class male viewers, with middle-class women less satisfied, through its stark conflict between Eric and Marcia; Bernard Hill's performance as downwardly-mobile Eric anticipates the frightening volatility of Yosser Hughes in *Boys from the Blackstuff* (1982).<sup>201</sup> Class tensions figure in practically all PFTs broadcast between January-April 1977 and March-April 1984 – often within households, including *King*, where class

<sup>200</sup> Exceptions like *Jessie* (1980), *Country* and *A Cotswold Death* (1982) critically surveyed rich families living in country houses; *ACD* depicts a wealthy Arab family living in a traditional English setting.

<sup>201</sup> Three months later, Hill was the infinitely more jovial Bernard Blincoe in *Our Flesh and Blood*. Eric and Marcia's conflict is echoed in *Desert of Lies*, but most incisively in *Sorry* (1981).

conflict affects one family. In 1977, PFTs were playful about middle-class anxieties over a threatening, ascendant working-class – *The Country Party* and *A Photograph*, with its gleeful Grand Guignol ending – while *Our Flesh and Blood* implicitly celebrated Britain’s historic levels of equality.

PfT’s later shift towards judgemental, prescriptive representations of its working-class characters mirrors the departure of producers McDonald, Matheson, Garnett, Rose and Trodd and writers who shared an empathy for the underdog, like Jim Allen, Alan Bleasdale, Brian Glover, Trevor Griffiths, Julia Jones, Peter McDougall, Alan Plater, Willy Russell and Colin Welland. By 1984, working-class characters are depicted as struggling in Thatcher’s Britain, prone to unemployment, which they do not respond to constructively, though marginal activists like Tone (Stephen Tiller) and side-lined caring women like Lorna and Susan are signified favourably.

Stark class divides in workplaces, schools, courtrooms, hospitals and households feature in *Baby Love*, *Taking Leave*, *Bet Your Life*, *The Spongers*, *Cries*, *A Hole in Babylon*, *The Network* and *Under the Hammer*. *Orkney* (1971) and two Barry Hines dramas have a Marxist perception of societal base and superstructure. In *Orkney*, the Laird sets the rents; the religious Minister controls through dispensing moral judgements. In Hines’s *The Price of Coal*, trenchant left-wing miner Sid (Bobby Knutt) criticises Prince Charles’s royal visit; *Speech Day* (1973) depicts the ironically-named Attlee comprehensive school pushing most of its pupils towards transient manual labour. The PfTs *The Rank and File* (1971), *Stocker’s Copper* (1972), *The Cheviot*, *Leeds United!*, *Destiny* and *United Kingdom* feature more directly political conflict. *Shakespeare or Bust!* (1973) showed an unusually optimistic transclass interaction: working-class autodidact miner Art (Brian Glover) is delighted when two RSC actors join them on their canal boat and give an impromptu Shakespeare performance.<sup>202</sup>

Several North-set PfTs advance an ‘Us’ against ‘Them’ perspective through Brechtian portrayals of aloof middle-class institutional types, who include the pompous, idle comprehensive school teacher Sinclair (James Grout) in *Ackerman*, *Dougall and Harker* (1972), who bemoans the loss of grammar-schools, most teachers in *Speech Day* and Roger Sloman’s fastidious, obfuscatory Tribunal member in *The Spongers*. In *The Mayor’s Charity* and *Vampires* (1979), local councillors and teachers are complacent and detached from their working-class electors or pupils. Contrastingly calm, professional and helpful

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<sup>202</sup> The BFI used an extract of a socialist speech Art gives, earlier, to a hippy, in a tweet promoting the release of their *Play For Today Volume One* BluRay set: BFI (2020) Twitter, 15 Oct [online] Available at: <https://twitter.com/BFI/status/1316734320065703937?t=PhvK2sgC1kK3TcJS2gQeXQ&s=03> [accessed:

public servants include Margaret Ashdown (Hannah Gordon) in *WTBB*, Det-Supt Langton (Jon Laurimore) in *A Story to Frighten the Children* (1976), Fay in *Love on a Gunboat* and Jonathan Foot (Don Warrington) in *Billy*, but these workers' impact is constrained by wider systems.<sup>203</sup> *Donal and Sally* (1978) extends PFT's indictment of institutions to powerfully represent how parental snobbery obstructs love between two young disabled people.

Stephen Fagan's *Under the Hammer*, a radio play adaptation, skewers an unaccountable, entrenched elite, like Fagan's *The Network* did previously.<sup>204</sup> The upper-class John Bourke-White (Michael Aldridge) and Geoffrey Anderson (James Maxwell) run a London auction room. These ultra-RP speakers inhabit the valuable gallery space, while the working-class porters, who maintain the paintings, are side-lined (see Figure 5.16). Patriotic porter Les Stone (Peter Vaughan) and left-wing Mick McClaren (Robert Putt) get into an argument over Cold War geopolitics; Les inadvertently kicks a hole in a valuable new Van Gogh painting that Bourke-White and Anderson plan to sell to rich Russians.



Figures 5.15-5.16. 5.15: 'Us and Them' consciousness in Leeds United! 99:31 and in 5.16: Under the Hammer, 05:54.

The curators and porters' class is denoted through costumes, while Austin Ruddy's set design artfully contrasts Bourke-White's ornate office with the bare, functional porters' quarters. This recalls Welland's *Leeds United!*, where bosses briefly appear in boardroom and golf course scenes, while the striking women textile workers occupy the Leeds streets (in Figure 5.15, they march to Woodhouse Moor for a rally). Fagan reveals the bosses' capitalist ruthlessness through their use and sacking of the deferent working-class Tory Les.

<sup>203</sup> Langton's efficient approach to apprehending Carol McLain's (Susan Littler) rapist and killer is hampered by people like the ordinary woman who, in a vox pop interview, claims that the victim Carol was asking for it.

<sup>204</sup> This production, directed by Margaret Windham, was broadcast on BBC Radio 4's Afternoon Theatre (1983).

PfT largely fulfilled Tony Garnett's aims of telling a variety of truthful stories concerning working-class life, often marked by a sharp 'Us and Them' consciousness. This was especially marked from 1972-78. Later, when PfT incorporated a range of varied feminist perspectives, portrayals of working-class culture were as embattled and increasingly bleak, while varied representations of an ascendant middle-class were predominant.

#### **5.4. Case-studies**

The following four case-studies represent, respectively: ethnicity, sexuality, gender and class: *In the Beautiful Caribbean*, *Even Solomon*, *Eve Set the Balls of Corruption Rolling* and *Through the Night*. All contain elements of intersectional overlap with each other. They are chosen for being significant exceptional outliers in differing ways – a Black-led socialist political drama set in Jamaica, an educative rites-of-passage drama about a transgender protagonist, a female-ensemble comedy-drama and a RAID concerning breast cancer in an NHS hospital that represents PfT's socialist humanism at its popular peak.

The first two case-studies are exceptional PfTs in portraying people, places and gender identities audiences would have been unfamiliar with. In different ways, *the* last two case-studies use familiar settings and themes to tell stories with specific, fresh truths: they respectively demonstrate PfT's liberal humanist and socialist humanist facets.

##### **5.4.1. Unfamiliar radical humanism: In the Beautiful Caribbean (1972)**

Playwright Barry Reckord's PfT *In the Beautiful Caribbean* (3 February 1972) (*ITBC*) is the only PfT where Black actors played all speaking roles. This rare overseas-set PfT (see Chapter 4) vividly represented contemporary Jamaican life and is intersectional in depicting gender and class power imbalances.

Reckord, born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1926, had five plays staged at George Devine's Royal Court (1958-73), which employed many working-class playwrights.<sup>205</sup> According to Reckord, 'heightened speech is ordinary speech which is [...] perceptive'.<sup>206</sup> He distinguishes his dialogue's heightened realism from casual-seeming naturalism, which purveys 'consecrated banalities about life, death and love'.<sup>207</sup> Reckord explores underneath 'surface reality': 'Most sex is conquest, and politics is conquest'.<sup>208</sup> Pam Brighton, who

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<sup>205</sup> Notably, the original 1963 *Skyvers* was performed with an all-white cast: the Royal Court claimed they 'could not find any black actors': Nicholson, S. (2012) *Modern British Playwriting: The 1960s: Voices, Documents, New Interpretations*. London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 69. The Court did also employ Black playwright Errol John.

<sup>206</sup> Reckord, B.; Y. Brewster (ed.) (2010) op. cit. 77. This is from Reckord's preface to *Skyvers*.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid. 78.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid. 77, 12.

directed the 1971 revival of *Skyvers* – which drew on Reckord’s experiences as a London comprehensive teacher – perceives his desire to address deep class divides.<sup>209</sup>

*ITBC* was Reckord’s second TV assignment, being shot on colour video-tape on 21-23 November 1971, via a five-camera set-up, plus a few stock film inserts of the Caribbean.<sup>210</sup> Philip Saville directed, in the largest TC1 studio, following extensive rehearsals.<sup>211</sup> Its producer Irene Shubik called it ‘a studio equivalent’ of *Edna*, ‘in terms of cost, complexity and chaos’.<sup>212</sup> Actor Ram John Holder recalls that,

Philip Saville did a fantastic job in bringing all these people together [including] Louise Bennett, who was playing herself, almost. We did it as an ensemble piece, like theatre. You rehearsed together for three weeks. Studio 1 and 2 were big enough to have any sort of background or street or whatever... [The sets were] wonderful, gorgeous and just right and perfect. [The] BBC really was doing [a] top-class job, the state-of-the-art thing at the time.<sup>213</sup>

Shubik commissioned Trinidad-born Horace Ové as musical director – his first PFT involvement.<sup>214</sup> For this ‘Brechtian musical’, or ‘reggae-calypso folk opera’, Ové commissioned Barry Chinfook, Rupert Cunningham and Junior Lincoln to compose eight songs, which often directly emphasise narrative developments.<sup>215</sup> Two performed hymns and three played records feature diegetically, including one by Jackie Mittoo.<sup>216</sup>

Press previews noted Reckord’s ironic title, considering his ‘bleak’ themes of Jamaica’s ‘poverty and unemployment’, which, for Sylvia Clayton, illuminated ‘why people emigrate’ to Britain.<sup>217</sup> Previewers foregrounded Louise Bennett – ‘Jamaica’s leading actress’ and ‘a legend in Jamaica’ – and Ram John Holder’s status as a rhythm ‘n’ blues player (see Figure 5.17).<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Brighton in: Reckord; Brewster (ed.) *ibid.* 72-73.

<sup>210</sup> Reckord, B. (1972) *Play for Today: In the Beautiful Caribbean* Camera Script, n.p. BBC WAC micro-film. Reckord’s first TV work was Granada’s 1962 version of his 1960 Royal Court play *You in Your Small Corner*.

<sup>211</sup> The production’s large cast and scale means TC1 is the only likely space to have hosted it in 1971: thanks to David Brunt for this information: Brunt, D. (2022) Email to author, 9 Aug.

<sup>212</sup> Shubik *op. cit.* 134-136. Shubik recounts how Lucita Lijertwood brought a wonderful ‘cauldron of West Indian stew’ for the cast each day, whose children ‘milled about constantly’.

<sup>213</sup> Holder, R.J. (2021) Interview with author, 17 Aug.

<sup>214</sup> Shubik *op. cit.* 135-136. Shubik recalls a live band of Rastafarians performed the songs in the studio, smoking copious cannabis.

<sup>215</sup> Shubik *ibid.* 135; Allan, E. (1972a) Poor island in the sun, *Sunday Times*, 30 Jan, 52. Lincoln ran various UK reggae record labels and was involved in releasing Studio One’s output in Britain. The eight songs are, in order of appearance: ‘In the Beautiful Caribbean’, ‘Love You Up’, ‘I, Bredda Ordinance’, ‘The Blood of the Country’, ‘Whitey, Chiney and Jews’, ‘Fire Fe You, Blood!’, ‘One Son of Africa’ and ‘Dis Big Debate’.

<sup>216</sup> Reckord (1972) *op. cit.* 52. Activist lawyer hero Jonathan talk-sings along to Mittoo’s song in a night-club.

<sup>217</sup> Purser, P. (1972a) Look Out For..., *Sunday Telegraph*, 30 Jan, 17; Clayton, S. (1972a) Choice, *Daily Telegraph*, 3 Feb, 29; Usher, S. (1972) On Television, *Daily Mail*, 3 Feb, 17; Griffiths, M. (1972) Tonight’s TV Preview, *Daily Mirror*, 3 Feb, 17; Allan (1972a) *op. cit.*

<sup>218</sup> Allan *ibid.*; Clayton (1972a) *ibid.*; Griffiths, M. (1972) *ibid.*

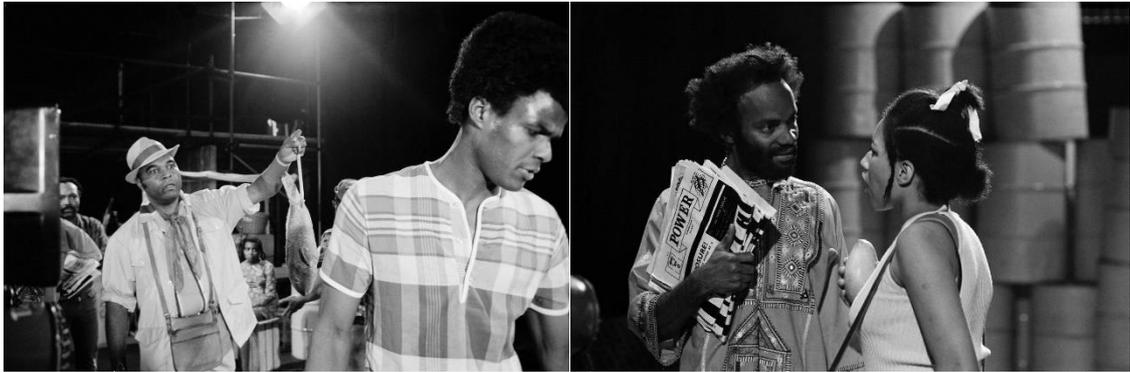


Ram John Holder: "hot" opera

Confusing play  
on Jamaican  
insurrection

Violent

Angles on the Irish screen  
Faces in the dark



Figures 5.17-5.20. 5.17 – Holder in Sunday Times preview; 5.18 – selection of ITBC’s press review headings and sub-headings; 5.19 – Zikky (Thomas Baptiste) holding fish and One Son (Rick James); 5.20 – Bredda Ordinance (Ram John Holder) & Young Gal (Danielle Delon).<sup>219</sup>

The play opens with One Son (Rick James) visiting his parents’ – Mercina (Louise Bennett) and Mass Rufus (Horace James) – shanty-shack home. Reckord captures Jamaica’s fraught geopolitics; the government, presumably based on Hugh Shearer’s incumbent centrist Jamaican Labour Party regime, enable colonialist American businesses to hoard the massive profits from bauxite that they convert into aluminium. A Black middle-class leader like politician Zikky (Thomas Baptiste) values the pragmatic US alliance, but is insensitive to the economic hardships faced by Kingston’s exploited working-class people. One Son is soon sacked from his job as captain of a fishing boat.

The articulate middle-class lawyer Jonathan Hall (Calvin Lockhart) wants Jamaica to align with the Soviet Union or, especially, Cuba.<sup>220</sup> Reckord knew the latter, having recently published ‘a serious and thorough study’ of Castro’s Communist nation, which perceived its ‘feeling of real equality’, undermined by Western countries.<sup>221</sup> While Rufus shares Zikky’s anti-Communism, claiming that Cubans face food shortages, Mercina struggles to

<sup>219</sup> In the background of the bottom left are a Rasta (Alfred Fagon) and Faye (Corinne Skinner Carter). Thanks to Stephen Bourne for identifying these two actors: Bourne, S. (2022) Email to author, 14 Feb. Images are from BBC Archive, used in: Kerrigan, L. (2020) The lost Play for Today’s we’ll never see, **BFI Features**, 4 Nov [online] Available at: <https://www.bfi.org.uk/features/lost-play-todays-well-never-see> [accessed: 08/02/2022].

<sup>220</sup> Tellingly, Zikky mocks Jonathan as ‘only a lawyer like Castro was a lawyer. This man is in politics’.

<sup>221</sup> Franco, J. (1971) The way of the third world, *Times Literary Supplement*, 3 Sep, 1044; Bourne, R. (1971) A hope for Cuba, *Guardian*, 22 Jul, 12.

sell fish due to price increases: ‘Me wan’ fish fi buy. A hell darkness gwine pour over de land. Fire an’ blood. Price mus’ control’.<sup>222</sup> One Son asks, ‘When black people goin’ strike?’ though violently threatens Zikky with a fish knife and kisses a gun at a Rastafarian meeting.<sup>223</sup> A loose radical grouping is completed by student Beth Pickney (Joan-Ann Maynard), Young Gal (Danielle Delon) and Bredda Ordinance (Ram John Holder). One Son, initially sceptical, embraces Ordinance’s passionate Black Power consciousness (see Figure 5.20, where he is carrying a Black Power publication).

*ITBC* depicts Jamaica and Britain’s connections. Jonathan refers to a Jamaican ‘brain drain’, while Ordinance explains how US companies’ bauxite exploitation causes migration: ‘So dem rich an we poor, an ha fe go to England to get wuk’.<sup>224</sup> Marie (Carmen Munroe) and Ralph (Charles Hyatt) trust in God and the white man, dismissing Ordinance’s socialist plan to nationalise the bauxite: ‘Nayga can’ run nutten’.<sup>225</sup> However, Beth argues that socialist Cuba has ‘solved the colour problem’.<sup>226</sup> Beth’s intersectional analysis that the colour ‘problem’ resides with the powerful is demonstrated in affluent Dot’s (Mona Hammond) claim that she is not Black, but ‘just a lady of colour’, dissociating herself from the politicised connotations of ‘Black’.<sup>227</sup> Elitists Zikky and Dot express feelings of class and ethnic superiority as lighter-skinned, prosperous people of colour.<sup>228</sup>

Like *Beloved Enemy* (1981), which David Rolinson analyses, *ITBC* has deep insights into the political and corporate elites’ hoarding of power and resources.<sup>229</sup> Young Gal tells how ‘Massa Powell’ – Enoch Powell – is now ‘locking us out’.<sup>230</sup> This emphasises Powell’s influence on Labour *and* Tory governments’ immigration policies. In the song ‘The Blood of the Country’, sugar and bauxite are Jamaicans’ lifeblood being drained away. Ordinance discerns English historical responsibility – ‘Englishman exploit our sugar for 300 years an now our sugar don’t suit dem’ – and indicts the recent US alignment.<sup>231</sup> As Jonathan

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<sup>222</sup> Reckord (1972) op. cit. 7, 21. Zikky puts this down to fish scarcity.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid. 22, 48.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid. 6, 9.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid. 17/18.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid. 43.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid. 35, 35A. Dot owns a ‘natty sports car’, while advocating the blacklisting of Black Power supporters and anyone with afro haircuts.

<sup>228</sup> Zikky and Dot express their hatred of Black people’s physical characteristics and traits: desiring to ‘breed out’ Blackness, which they associate, ironically, with laziness: *ibid.* 42, 44.

<sup>229</sup> Rolinson (2005) op. cit. 101. As Rolinson claims, ‘The international scale of *Beloved Enemy* sheds light on some of the political causes of the unemployment and social dislocation explored’ in other Clarke works, *Made in Britain* (1983) and *Road* (1987).

<sup>230</sup> Reckord op. cit. 9.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid. 9, 29

explains, the American company sells the aluminium for more than 20 times what they pay the Jamaicans for it.<sup>232</sup>

Jamaica's regime relies on an oppressive police force, authoritarian towards political dissent: a situation Jonathan worries could soon resemble totalitarian Haiti.<sup>233</sup> While anticipating *A Hole in Babylon*, Reckord depicts extremer police brutality: One Son is killed in custody; he is seen in the morgue: 'BEATEN UNRECOGNISABLE BY THE POLICE'.<sup>234</sup> Subsequently, Jonathan addresses 'A HUGE POLITICAL MEETING', with 28 characters – and many unnamed extras – who appear in 19 reaction-shots, intercut with Jonathan's rousing speech.<sup>235</sup> Within an expansive VS spectacle, Myrtle McKenzie and Lucita Lijertwood carry banners, signifying their commitment to Black Power; former sceptic Marie is shown in close-up.<sup>236</sup> Reckord's stage direction – 'CROWD IN PHALANX with darkness round' – emphasises this is a class war.<sup>237</sup>

Jonathan eloquently outlines the historical injustices of the Atlantic slave trade: with more analytical edge than Ernest's personal, genealogical account in *Murder Rap*.<sup>238</sup> He recounts the disproportionate death toll at Montego Bay: 'Three or four dead whites and three or four hundred dead blacks. That is the usual proportion'.<sup>239</sup> Jonathan indicts the government for ignoring poverty, illiteracy and the '500,000' unemployed people.<sup>240</sup> He denies that white property will be seized in the revolution; the new Jamaica will be conciliatory and humanist, anticipating Paul Gilroy's thinking:

I say that no white face is ever again going to rule this country, or own this country. We ain't scarcely allowed in theirs yet they come here and own us? They are welcome as brothers. They are welcome as sisters, wives, husbands. They are welcome as workers, they are welcome as partners but as owners they are not welcome. [...] This is a new day. The end of white privilege. The end of black privilege. Of all privilege. Blackness is not enough. I see our people learning to share in the long struggle to build and enjoy in equality the result of that struggle.<sup>241</sup>

The crowd sing: 'Hear ye him'. Jonathan echoes Mercina's earlier call for universal justice, reason and peace, though he concludes emotionally, invoking One Son and

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid. 37. Internally, this unfair distribution of wealth benefits the Black middle-class elite.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid. 53.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid. 50/51.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid. 60, 62A-62B. Of the 28 characters, 16 are women, 12 are men.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid. 62A-62B.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid. 62A

<sup>238</sup> Jonathan invokes two slave rebellions: in Montego Bay during 1831-32, led by 'Daddy' Samuel Sharpe, and in Morant Bay in 1865, spearheaded by Paul Bogle.

<sup>239</sup> Reckord (1972) op. cit. 60.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid. 62. Elsewhere, Reckord pinpointed this as 22% of Jamaicans, in Franco op. cit. Implicitly, Jonathan wants these problems addressed like in Castro's Cuba: ibid. 53A.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid. 62.

Malcolm X in a call to kill those responsible: a vengeance which viewers may see as disturbing or proportionate.<sup>242</sup>

With tragic inevitability, violence ensues. As in Thomas Clarke's *Stocker's Copper* – broadcast two weeks before – the police clearly initiate the violence, joined by some US army soldiers, against the doomed insurrectionists. A soldier dies, alongside a Rasta and Marie; implicitly, many more rebels are slain off-screen.<sup>243</sup> Subsequently, a Judge (Frank Singuinea) sentences Jonathan to execution, restating conservative hierarchies and dismissing social justice.<sup>244</sup> Beth goes to work in Zikky and Dot's household; Dot touches Beth's cheek, emphasising how class exploitation supersedes gender and ethnicity. *ITBC*'s downbeat denouement had a happier coda; in under a month, Jamaicans elected a socialist National People's Party administration, led by Michael Manley, who enacted Reckord's geopolitical desire to move closer to Cuba.

3.84 million people watched *ITBC*.<sup>245</sup> *ITBC*'s RI was a low 46; 64% found it hard to follow, with actors' accents 'difficult to understand', especially 'against a noisy background'.<sup>246</sup> For many viewers, the unfamiliar *ITBC* required 'too much effort of concentration'; many switched off, some conservatively decrying its violence, 'obscene, blasphemous' language or, naively, 'an element of racialism'.<sup>247</sup> However, Calvin Lockhart's performance was praised and the production's aesthetics elicited fascinatingly contradictory responses: 'a bit dark', 'too dark or overcrowded at times', 'Extremely colourful – found the lack of sets interesting', 'Scenery was marvellous'.<sup>248</sup> Those who persisted liked Reckord's 'disturbing' play for its originality, realism, pathos, comedy and its 'rarely sympathetic treatment' of 'the coloured [sic] man's problems'.<sup>249</sup>

Critic Mary Holland admired *ITBC*'s relevance but not its 'bare bony sets' and slow pacing.<sup>250</sup> Sylvia Clayton recoiled from its binary presentation of 'villains and victims of

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid. 62A.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid. 69-70.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid. 70-71.

<sup>245</sup> In opposition on BBC2 was Vera Lynn; ITV had news programming presumably centring on Bloody Sunday.

<sup>246</sup> BBC ARD (1972) *Audience Research Report: Play for Today: In the Beautiful Caribbean*, 17 Feb, VR/72/32. Many complained about an incomprehensible opening ten minutes, one claiming they 'cannot stand these shouting, shrieking plays'. A slightly smaller majority did not find it entertaining.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid. Of 118 PFTs I have comparable data for, *ITBC* had the second lowest percentage of viewers who watched the full drama: 39%.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid. While this report sometimes uses dubious language, it conveys *ITBC*'s vanguard viewers' open-mindedness: 'a few' were 'disappointed' that the end overlapped 20 minutes into BBC2's screening of Vittorio De Sica's Italian neo-realist film *The Children Are Watching Us* (1943).

<sup>250</sup> Holland, M. (1972) *Angles on the Irish screen*, *Observer*, 6 Feb, 31. Its Camera Script indicates that *ITBC*'s ASL was 14.1. Holland's response indicates a desire for escapism following Bloody Sunday.

the social system’; Peter Black questioned the realism of police and legal brutality.<sup>251</sup> However, Black admired Saville’s elegantly theatrical direction, moving the actors ‘against dark backgrounds and allowing them to declaim as though every syllable had to bounce off the back of the gallery’ and the piercing, persuasive clarity of Jonathan’s ‘fine’ speech: ‘one felt one was hearing important things from an authentic voice’.<sup>252</sup> While being parochially averse to the ‘poorer Jamaicans [speaking] in very broad dialect’ and Reckord’s inclusion of too many Jamaican societal problems, Chris Dunkley praised *ITBC* for its ‘conviction’, echoing Alan Brien, Holland and Black in arguing it was a relevant ‘warning’, with its confrontational climax ‘all too reminiscent of Londonderry or Sharpeville’.<sup>253</sup>

In their weekly meeting, BBC managers echoed the press consensus criticising *ITBC*’s opening, but BBC1 Controller Paul Fox thought it ‘a worthy attempt’.<sup>254</sup> Irene Shubik felt that *ITBC* was overly ambitious for TV, but regarded it ‘as one of the most worthwhile and enjoyable experiments in which I have ever been involved’.<sup>255</sup> Ram John Holder recalls it being received ‘very, very well’ by the public and emphasises the importance of *ITBC* – and PFT more generally – as providing ‘great theatre for people who didn’t have a tendency or tradition of going to the theatre. The BBC brought the theatre into their homes, into their living rooms, their lounges. And that was fantastic, a great service of Plays for Today’.<sup>256</sup>

No recording of *ITBC* exists; sadly, we cannot see the remarkable cast’s performances. However, *ITBC* enjoyed a tangible afterlife, being adapted as a Jamaica National Stage Theatre Trust production, directed by Barry’s brother Lloyd Reckord, opening at the Ward Theatre, Kingston in April 1972; theatrical impresario Oscar Loewenstein, who saw *ITBC* in its studio recording, commissioned Reckord to write a stage musical version.<sup>257</sup>

Reckord’s subsequent Second City Firsts play *Club Havana* (1975) was an incisive, smaller-scale distillation of the themes of class and race in *ITBC*.<sup>258</sup> In 1980, Reckord

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<sup>251</sup> Clayton, S. (1972b) Confusing play on Jamaican insurrection, *Daily Telegraph*, 4 Feb, 11; Black, P. (1972) Entertainment/2, *Daily Mail*, 4 Feb, 17.

<sup>252</sup> Black *ibid*.

<sup>253</sup> Dunkley, C. (1972a) In the Beautiful Caribbean, *Times*, 4 Feb, 9; Holland, M. *op. cit.*; Brien, A. (1972) Faces in the dark, *Sunday Times*, 6 Feb, 29.

<sup>254</sup> BBC TWPR (1972) Meeting Minutes, 9 Feb, 7, BBC WAC micro-film.

<sup>255</sup> Shubik *op. cit.* 136.

<sup>256</sup> Holder *op. cit.*

<sup>257</sup> Reckord in: Brewster *op. cit.* 11, 250; Shubik *op. cit.* 136. It seems this was not produced; Reckord’s next stage play *Give the Gaffers Time to Love You* opened at the Royal Court Upstairs in May 1973.

<sup>258</sup> *Club Havana*, directed by his collaborator Pam Brighton, draws on Reckord’s experiences as a teacher. Mona Hammond’s character’s class snobbery echoes Dot’s in *ITBC*.

reworked *ITBC* as *Joshua versus Spiderman* for the Jamaican stage.<sup>259</sup> Also, unlike with *Skyvers* in 1963, *ITBC*'s director Philip Saville subsequently employed many Black and Asian actors on Philip Martin's *Gangsters*.<sup>260</sup>

#### 5.4.2. *Educative humanist drama: Even Solomon (1979)*

As previously mentioned, few PFTs portrayed transsexual lives. However, Andrew Taylor's innovative *Even Solomon* (1 November 1979) advanced on Hall's recent *Coming Out* in its dramatically fresh and carefully informative perspective on transgender experience. The writer arrived at this through an imaginative, empathetic creative process, rather than drawing on his own direct experience as Watson Gould had with *The Other Woman*.<sup>261</sup> According to producer Anne Head, Taylor was a married heterosexual father with 'great sympathy for people like this'.<sup>262</sup> Its videoed majority was shot in the TC3 studio on 11-13 May 1979, while a sixth of its duration was shot on 16mm in locations in and around Newbury, Berkshire on 15-17 May.<sup>263</sup>

The protagonist Susan – initially, Stephen – Piper (Paul Henley) is presented as faced with everyday bigotry, prurience and ignorance. Directly associating with PFT's critical motif concerning bodily objectification, the play opens with a shot of the front cover of the magazine *Knave*, which displays a naked woman.<sup>264</sup> It becomes clear that Peter Blakeney (Simon Rouse) is 'reading' it, who bullies 'Stephen' in their bank workplace with inane banter. The opening confronts us with a symbol of Susan's feelings of distress at a society which luridly over-sexualises, and coarsely degrades, women. *Even Solomon* contains nuanced criticism of Susan's mum Sylvia Morris (Sylvia Kay), who is a hedonistic 1960s liberal, but is scared of the changes in her 'son'. When she is out on a Saturday night date with a man who stands her up, 'Stephen' is at home, playing a recording of French composer Gabriel Fauré's 1890 choral-orchestral *Requiem* in D-minor and dressing up in women's clothes he has bought from Jake's (Bruce Purchase) shop. At this stage, 'Stephen' believes he is a transvestite, but does not feel homosexual, nor especially heterosexual either. 'He' asserts his developing identity:

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<sup>259</sup> Reckord; Brewster op. cit. 251.

<sup>260</sup> Ironically, Martin had been in *Skyvers*' original stage cast.

<sup>261</sup> Farquhar, S. (2017) Savage Ms-Siah, **Dreams Gathering Dust** [online] Available at: <https://dreamsgatheringdust.com/2017/06/05/the-other-woman/> [accessed: 17/08/2022].

<sup>262</sup> Howes (1994) op. cit. 230; Farquhar ibid.

<sup>263</sup> BBC (1979) *Programme-as-Completed – Play for Today: Even Solomon*, 27 Nov [supplied by Jacmel Dent].

<sup>264</sup> *Knave* (1968-2015) was an upmarket pornographic magazine, launched by Russell Gay. In its eclectic history, it featured Mary Millington and Cosey Fanni Tutti as models and writer Neil Gaiman's early short-stories.

Sylvia, listen to me. I'm your son, Stephen, I always have been... Now, take a good look at me... This is the way I want to be. Like this. I'm happy... I'm adult, I'm confident. I'm everything I wasn't. This is me. And I'm not going back. I'm not going back, ever...

After scoffing, fearfully, Sylvia inches forward in her approach. She takes her 'son' to see Jake: a bearded old flame of hers, with an easy-going countercultural air, who runs a clothes shop in a van. A 17-minute scene in the van (53:56-71:01), conveys, clearly, issues and feelings that would have been unfamiliar to most viewers beyond certain academics and those with direct experience; transgender life had been misrepresented widely via sensationalist tabloid coverage. To help 'Stephen', Jake has contacted his former employer Sam (Derek Farr), an urbane restaurateur and transvestite, who was married to a woman, has three children and a grandchild and who compartmentalises his dressing in women's clothes. After talking, Sam wisely discerns that 'Stephen', who wants to be a woman 'every second of the day', is not a transvestite at all, but a transsexual.

Belying his surface respectability, Sam responds to Sylvia's call for an immediate 'cure' for her 'son' by firmly asserting: 'You can't cure people against their wills'. Sylvia retorts: 'It just isn't normal... Don't give me any of that crap about nobody is normal, some people are... They must be'. Jake responds, gently: 'They? Who's *they*, lady?' Susan feels that Sam's explanation finally makes sense of her experiences; she listens to his warnings about the societal prejudice and difficulties she will face when changing jobs, applying for a passport or encountering other bureaucratic processes. This profoundly unspectacular scene is ideally suited to the video-studio aesthetic, as it centres on four human beings in a convincing but unobtrusive set, communicating with difficulty, but all progressing in their knowledge and empathy. This van-set scene's ASL is 9.9, with its oscillations between careful explanation and dramatic confrontation. The previous, all-filmed 97-second exterior scene has a rapid ASL of 4.4; for the 17-minute interior scene, using such fast editing, recognisable locations or grainy film would have distracted focus from the performances and words – which come across clearly within the humane spatial haven of Jake's van.

Comparably to her mother's initially grudging, closed-minded reaction, Susan's NHS doctor (William Simons) refuses to take her seriously. Even worse, some of her colleagues at her bank workplace display an ignorant prejudice: the laddish Peter and airheaded Lorraine (Sally Watkins) persistently express nasty homophobic slurs against her. While the doctor eventually agrees to the sex-change procedure, it seems likely that Peter and Lorraine may never learn. Taylor signifies these characters as reprehensible representatives of wider societal bigotry. At the climax, Susan enters her workplace: now, openly, calling

herself Susan and wearing women's clothes, receiving an aghast, frosty reaction from Peter and Lorraine, who shrieks absurdly. Taylor critiques fear of the unknown, through the voice of the boss Mr Leslie (Colin Douglas), who brands Lorraine a 'stupid girl', dismissively. Conversing with Susan, Leslie professes himself baffled, being 'long in the tooth', but he listens attentively. Another colleague Corrigan (James Healey) wishes Susan well, who in turn wishes Corrigan well for his wedding. Thus, Taylor shows a poised 50:50 balance between enlightened and fearful bank workers. Wryly, following Susan's exit – where she politely but disdainfully puts Peter in his place – Taylor has Peter confess to Lorraine that, 'when it [Susan] worked through the door, I fancied it something shocking. I mean that can't be normal, can it?'

This discursive, studio-concentrated mockery of Peter's newfound sexual insecurity links back to Jake's earlier wise questioning of the 'normal'. It is followed by filmed, dialogue-free shots of Susan driving on the motorway towards London to start her new life, enacting PFT's master-plot of escape. Over the credits, we hear the third section of Fauré's *Requiem*, 'Sanctus'; after the last production credit, director Roger Bamford shifts back to the interiority of video-studio: Susan opens the curtains in her new flat. Tomorrow is a new day and this PFT delivers an exceptionally optimistic, if grounded, ending.

After its original broadcast, Howes criticised *Even Solomon* as 'histrionically didactic' and 'prurient agit-prop', but also observed it was 'necessary', and that it nearly asked a lot of questions; by 2020, he more warmly saw it as a 'good' dramatisation of 'gender identity'.<sup>265</sup> *Even Solomon* is the BBC, and BBC Plays, at their educative, entertaining best. A more discursive, conversational and less sensationalist drama than *The Other Woman*, it nevertheless matches Gould's PFT in its well-structured conflict, which Bamford directs sensitively within TC3.<sup>266</sup> In designer Paul Joel's exceptional, ordinary-appearing sets, the cast have space and time to deliver sustained, developing performances; further aided by studio shooting's consecutive, ordered nature. The result is a PFT not simply ahead of its time, but of ours too.

*Even Solomon* articulates a marginalised perspective clearly and accessibly. Unlike the subtle, intellectually-advanced *Penda's Fen* and *Two Sundays* – whose deep messages eluded many viewers – Anne Head's production is more democratic in communicating Taylor's intelligent perspective on transsexualism and transvestism successfully to a large mainstream audience of 6 million. Its RI was a high 68: viewers welcomed its 'necessary

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<sup>265</sup> Howes, K. (1979b) In italics, *Gay News*, 165, 15 Nov, 30; Howes (2020) op. cit.

<sup>266</sup> BBC (1979) op. cit. Joan Atkinson compiled this document.

insight' into 'unusual and important subject matter', treated 'sympathetically, yet realistically'.<sup>267</sup> Critics were mixed: Herbert Kretzmer conservatively bemoaned how Susan was not 'identifiable', though Jennifer Lovelace found this 'astute choice' for a PFT 'absorbing and interesting'.<sup>268</sup> However, a highly appreciative mention in the *Church Times* and glowing letters in the *Radio Times* showed that its educative 'insight' into transsexualism and its 'great compassion and wit' were widely welcomed.<sup>269</sup>

#### 5.4.3. Liberal humanist frankness – Eve Set the Balls of Corruption Rolling (1982)

Adapting Vicky Ball's terms, Marcella Evaristi's only PFT, *Eve Set the Balls of Corruption* (30 March 1982) (*Eve*), is a female-ensemble comedy-drama (FECD). Its drama is combined, fruitfully, with the strand's sole excursion into gynocentric Glasgow-set screwball comedy.<sup>270</sup> Women actors comprise 70.6% of its credited cast, including *all* the top-billed roles. It is broadly in the Nichols-Clark-Rosenthal line of *seemingly* non-political, well-crafted PFT comedy-dramas (see Chapter 3), while being deeply, and understatedly, feminist. *Eve* has a deceptively freewheeling structure, centring on middle-class Glaswegian women conversing in an environment, but Evaristi inserts several climactic dramatic situations to intensify the drama.

Actor-writer Evaristi grew up in suburban middle-class Glasgow; her parents' Jewish and Italian ancestry made her 'insanely different' from most people around her.<sup>271</sup> Evaristi went to the Catholic Notre Dame High School, a single-sex direct-grant grammar-school. Her formative cultural experiences included seeing 'joyous' music-hall at Glasgow's Alhambra Theatre.<sup>272</sup> She recalls being 'a weird kid', whose 'head was a blizzard of ideas and politics' from reading the *New Statesman*, Bertrand Russell and existentialist philosophy by Jean-Paul Sartre and Iris Murdoch, whose writings she found a 'joy' in revealing the links between love, art and empathy.<sup>273</sup> At 17, she was the first in her family to go to University.

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<sup>267</sup> BBC ARD (1979) *Audience Research Report – Play for Today: Even Solomon*, 21 Nov, VR/79/491.

<sup>268</sup> Kretzmer, H. (1979b) Coming to terms with one of nature's tricks, *Daily Mail*, 2 Nov, 27; Lovelace, J. (1979) Left with a dilemma – raw edges removed, *Television Today*, 8 Nov, 22.

<sup>269</sup> Duggan, M. (1979) It seems to me – Male and Female, *Church Times*, 9 Nov, 8; Pringle, I.A. & Briant, I. (1979) LETTERS: Judgment on Solomon, 29 Nov, 89.

<sup>270</sup> This PFT's working-title was *The Reunion*.

<sup>271</sup> Evaristi, M. (2021a) Interview with author, 8 Oct.

<sup>272</sup> Alhambra performers she recalls include Rikki Fulton; over the road, her father ran a 'magnificent, old-fashioned café': Evaristi, M. (2021b) Interview with author, 29 Oct.

<sup>273</sup> Evaristi (2021b) op. cit. Evaristi jokily recounts how, as a teenager, she smoked to further her self-image as a Parisian intellectual.

Today, Evaristi perceives herself as a Second Wave ‘equality feminist’, opposed to how deconstructionist ‘postmodernists’ like Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler exalt group identity, and a liberal humanist, who values Enlightenment thought over an overly statist New Left.<sup>274</sup> While she opposes positive discrimination, Evaristi professes that, in comparison to prose fiction, there *were* ridiculously few women theatre or TV dramatists. Evaristi has primarily worked for stage and radio, being linked with fellow Glaswegians Agnes Owens and Liz Lochhead in centring on ‘ordinary, sometimes desperate lives [...] always with wit and style’.<sup>275</sup>

*Eve* was shot from 18 October to 5 November 1981, primarily on OB video, though 10.9% of it was shot on 16mm film in three days.<sup>276</sup> *Eve* features a contemporary school reunion attended by women alumnae of direct-grant grammar-school St Margaret’s, now a comprehensive. OB locations included Partick Borough Hall and Notre Dame Primary School; despite such proximity to Evaristi’s experiences, she claims that *Eve* was mostly invention.<sup>277</sup> Elizabeth Cowley heralded Evaristi’s play as ‘funny, spirited and moving’ and her performance as ‘a well-adjusted intellectual’.<sup>278</sup> The *Daily Mirror* quoted Evaristi on how most TV reunions centre on women in their forties or fifties, so it was ‘fun’ to have a reunion featuring women under thirty, like her.<sup>279</sup> In the *Radio Times*, Evaristi articulated more serious motives: ‘I intend it to be a study in social attitudes, in snobbery, in the deception of memory that tells us that our childhood was better than it was’.<sup>280</sup>

The women who reunite in *Eve* are: Laura Biagotti (Marcella Evaristi), a bookshop worker, Fran Blake (Sarah Collier), a script reader in publishing, Mary Muirhead (Gaylie Runciman), a medical GP, Morag (Janette Foggo), a hotelier, Louise Callaghan (Debbie Wheeler), an expectant housewife, and Geraldine Johnston (Bridget McCann), who teaches German at St Margaret’s. Laura is, Evaristi admits, ‘quite like me’, but is also a created comic persona.<sup>281</sup> She credits director David Maloney for insisting that she play Laura and his astute advice to tone down her theatrical performance style for TV.<sup>282</sup> The play opens with a title-song composed by Martin Dalby with lyrics by Evaristi and sung by current girl pupils of Notre Dame High School. In retrospect, Evaristi praises the ensemble cast’s

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Wade, D. (1988) Glasgow’s women of letters, *The Independent*, 11 Apr, 15.

<sup>276</sup> BBC (1982) *Programme-as-Completed – Play for Today: Eve Set the Balls of Corruption Rolling*, n.d., 2 [supplied by Jacmel Dent].

<sup>277</sup> Evaristi, M. (2021a) op. cit.

<sup>278</sup> Cowley, E. (1982) Pick of the Day, *Daily Mail*, 30 Mar, 19.

<sup>279</sup> Anon (1982a) A double first..., *Daily Mirror*, 30 Mar, 19.

<sup>280</sup> Ottaway, R. (1982) Journey into the past, *Radio Times*, 27 Mar, 5.

<sup>281</sup> Evaristi (2021a) op. cit.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

‘terrific performances’, recalling their ‘great professionalism’ and shared sense of hilarity while doing a ‘project that was *ours*’.<sup>283</sup>

Some of the women’s old resentments persist: most dislike the snobbish Geraldine, a workaholic, who habitually moralises waspishly. Flashbacks include Laura’s girlhood confession to a Catholic priest (John Young) that she masturbates; the hapless priest thinks he is speaking to a boy! An extended flashback to the late-1960s features the women as teenagers, in the girls’ toilets. Several early-1980s PFTs use such worldly spaces: ladies’ toilets in *Ladies* and *The Good Time Girls* and a gent’s in *EGAPL*.<sup>284</sup> Laura and Fran converse in a vivacious, gossipy register about sex and fashion, and compliment Morag on her Twiggy look.

Witty bohemians Laura and Fran enjoy sharing their sophisticated international cultural tastes: Françoise Hardy and Leonard Cohen’s music and Italian director Bernardo Bertolucci’s films.<sup>285</sup> Morag is an outlier in being a *Dallas* viewer. Evaristi generates deep empathy for Morag, who values the expensive furs she wears, her Porsche car, black cigarettes and status as an Isle of Skye hotelier. She boasts, increasingly forlornly, about these material symbols to her unresponsive old classmates. Evaristi praises how Foggo enacts Morag’s ‘unhappiness [...] so defensive and yet defiant’, and conveys her poignant melancholy response to how the others do not notice she has ‘made it’, as they regard success differently.<sup>286</sup>

Evaristi fuses such insights into materialism with liberal humanist satire of Geraldine’s contrived left-wing rhetoric when addressing the reunited women: extolling ‘solidarity’ and their all being ‘of the same pack’. Evaristi portrays the teenage Laura’s self-expressed ‘atheistic existentialism’ as a freer way of being, even if, typically for an Evaristi protagonist, she has ‘insight without power’.<sup>287</sup> Laura prioritises tangible friendships over Geraldine’s phony, abstract invocations of team spirit. Following discussion of the school’s becoming a comprehensive, Mary hopes it will also go non-denominational: her pluralistic outlook emphasises choice and universality. The toilet flashback shows that Geraldine’s dictatorial moralism was present in the permissive 1960s, revealing its roots in

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> *EGAPL* writer Rita May recalls that one or two people called her ‘refreshing’ for including this gent’s loo scene, which producer John Norton believed was the first instance in a TV play: May, R. (2022) Interview with author, 25 Feb. However, 1973-79 PFTs had contained such scenes, including *KAF*, *Sunset Across the Bay* and *Just A Boys’ Game*. With tragic bathos, *Sunset* depicts how Mam’s generational reticence in entering a male public convenience delays the discovery of Dad, who suffers a fatal stroke there.

<sup>285</sup> Evaristi herself loved Leonard Cohen’s music as a teenager and adult: Evaristi (2021a) op. cit.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Wade op. cit.

her insecurity, due to her illegitimacy. This explains Geraldine's dislike of Laura, who she primly criticises for being too sexually forward.

The women, other than Geraldine, were and are hedonistic, enjoying drinking and smoking. *Eve* revolves around women talking, which includes disclosure of societal misogyny. Like Rachel Billington's *Don't Be Silly*, Evaristi shows that middle-class women are affected by male violence: Laura confides to Fran that her teacher husband has hit her. While she has forgiven him, classing it as an aberration, this is a troubling, unresolved situation. This follows an earlier scene where Collier conveys with élan Fran's deep feelings of alienation from her writer husband, a boring, arrogant and inattentive adulterer.

We learn that Morag's hotelier status is an unearned, hereditary gift from her father: emphasising Evaristi's perception of the emptiness of status and how actions are more important than claims or possessions. Mary's success is the most socially useful. When Laura and Fran chance upon the pregnant Louise experiencing contractions in the toilet, Mary uses her day-job skills to care for Louise until the ambulance arrives.

Simultaneously, a drunken Morag tries, and fails, to conversationally lord it over a pair of likeably rebellious schoolgirls Patty (Caroline Guthrie) and Theresa (Linda Muchan), who are enjoying an illicit drink in the school kitchens. Foggo expertly performs Morag's underlying thick Glaswegian accent as strengthening the more she drinks.<sup>288</sup> Morag assaults the luckless Patty, whom the snooty Geraldine chastises for drinking and smoking, though Geraldine responsibly drives her home. This is juxtaposed with a fast-cut filmed sequence where Morag recklessly drink-drives her Porsche, which contrasts with *Eve*'s sedate overall ASL of 10.57.

*Eve*'s ending is significantly quotidian. Mary has ensured that Louise can give birth.<sup>289</sup> The police apprehend Morag: Foggo brilliantly conveys her affronted, sozzled anger at the indignity of being breathalysed. After this serio-comic 16mm film segment, we return to OB video shots of Laura and Fran walking the nocturnal streets of Glasgow, gossiping. Their reminiscences shift to warm spontaneity: Laura switches, drolly, from denying using a metaphor to suggesting to Fran that they have some chips. They enter the fish-and-chips shop and we hear the choral title song over the credits. *Eve* signifies our human need for

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<sup>288</sup> Foggo admires how Evaristi showed a woman like Morag drunk, 'as opposed to it being a [...] group of working-class girls shooting off down Sauciehall Street on a Friday night, giving it welly and abusing people': Foggo op. cit.

<sup>289</sup> This contrasts with Miriam's bleak miscarriage in the workplace toilets in *Ladies*.

lasting, varied friendships, evident also in how Laura and Mary have arranged to have lunch next week.

Typically regarding BBC Scotland PFTs, only four London press critics reviewed *Eve*, though they were appreciative. The least impressed, Day-Lewis, saw its characters as overly ‘sketch-like’, but did find it more ‘lively and enjoyable’ than most BBC Scotland dramas.<sup>290</sup> Herbert Kretzmer lauded Evaristi’s ‘smart’ comedy as the best of its kind since Mary O’Malley’s stage-play *Once A Catholic* (1977), discerning how Evaristi’s ‘main scorn and anger [was] directed against a puritan teacher whose sham pretensions towards refinement collapse cruelly in the face of a real emergency’.<sup>291</sup> Dennis Hackett and William Boyd both admired the characters’ ‘spiky’, ‘marvellously barbed exchanges’ and Evaristi’s melancholy humour.<sup>292</sup>

The Glasgow *Herald*’s Don Whyte saw Evaristi’s ‘down-to-earth, naïve, wicked and witty’ writing as enabling ‘Scotland’s young actresses’ to take wing.<sup>293</sup> Day-Lewis’s pejorative claim that the characters were all ‘instantly recognisable type[s]’ was advanced more positively by Anne Campbell Dixon, who recognised in them ‘so many of the old girls from my own schooldays’.<sup>294</sup> Whyte’s aside that *Eve* was ‘perhaps a little too frank for some tastes’ implicitly shows how this bawdy play – and the responses it elicited – affirm the relaxation of moral attitudes in the 1960s-70s that Evaristi welcomed.<sup>295</sup> *Eve* won Evaristi the Pye Colour Television Award for Most Promising Writer New to TV.<sup>296</sup> However, Evaristi failed to achieve sustained TV commissions, as her televisual ‘second album’ for Granada’s short-lived Women strand, *Hard to Get* (1983) was ‘not well received’.<sup>297</sup>

*Eve* obtained a very high audience of 8 million.<sup>298</sup> Evaristi recalls how her Italian aunts found the confession scene ‘the most hilarious thing they’d ever seen’: showing how she

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<sup>290</sup> Day-Lewis, S. (1982) Club acts I would rather miss, *Daily Telegraph*, 31 Mar, 13. Day-Lewis’s aversion to club-act stylistics is odd, considering PFT’s wide use of comedy club performers (see Chapter 4).

<sup>291</sup> Kretzmer, H. (1982) Life’s a let-down, old girl! *Daily Mail*, 31 Mar, 27.

<sup>292</sup> Hackett, D. (1982) Working models, *Times*, 31 Mar, 11; Boyd, W. (1982) Television, *New Statesman*, 2 Apr, 27.

<sup>293</sup> Whyte, D. (1982) Last Night’s View, *Herald*, 31 Mar, 22.

<sup>294</sup> Day-Lewis (1982) op. cit.; Campbell Dixon, A. (1982) Television – Tuesday, *Daily Telegraph*, 30 Mar, 28.

<sup>295</sup> Whyte op. cit.

<sup>296</sup> Anon (1982b) Pye Honours Young Talent, *Broadcast*, 31 May, 11. With poignant historical symbolism, this article has an image of Colin Welland with Evaristi at the May 1982 event, suggesting a generational passing of the baton from one PFT writer-actor to another.

<sup>297</sup> Evaristi (2021b) op. cit. It may also have been down to how BBC Scotland preferred to commission working-class male writers (see Chapter 4).

<sup>298</sup> While its RI figure is yet to be traced, it would be unsurprising were it as high as O’Malley’s *Oy Vay Maria* achieved.

successfully created the ‘wincing laughter of recognition’.<sup>299</sup> When asked, Evaristi agreed that PFT was well described as being essentially humanist: ‘good writing almost by definition has to be humanist [and moving]’.<sup>300</sup> *Eve* is an entertaining, incisive and poignant FECD and the pinnacle of PFT’s liberal humanism.

#### 5.4.4. Socialist humanism, ‘done with maximum care’<sup>301</sup>: *Through the Night* (1975)

Unlike most previous case-studies, Trevor Griffiths’s *Through the Night* (2 December 1975) (*TTN*) has been extensively documented, though its only television repeat was in 1977 and it is unavailable on physical media. *TTN* dramatises failures of communication in health care, using studio space to encourage viewers to watch in a more distanced, critical way.<sup>302</sup>

Trevor Griffiths was from a working-class Manchester background, who went to grammar-school and became a teacher.<sup>303</sup> From 1960, Griffiths sometimes chaired his local Manchester Left Club, encountering Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson. The New Left’s socialist humanism – opposing Stalinist ‘economic determinism and antihumanism’ – infuses Griffiths’s ‘historical and sociological emphases’.<sup>304</sup> Griffiths communicated with viewers using their own language, preferring TV over theatre as its vastly larger reach made the medium potentially ‘dangerous’ to the powers-that-be.<sup>305</sup> Griffiths trusted in viewers’ intelligence, agreeing with Raymond Williams’s dismissal of claims that the ‘telly-glued’ masses are easily manipulated.<sup>306</sup>

*TTN* emerged after Griffiths’s wife Jan entered hospital and experienced troublingly inhumane care during a mastectomy.<sup>307</sup> Trevor’s notes and Jan’s diary from this time

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<sup>299</sup> Evaristi (2021a) op. cit.; Evaristi (2021b) *ibid.*

<sup>300</sup> Evaristi (2021b) *ibid.* Evaristi notes how even Brecht’s *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1941), which pretends not to be, is still humanist.

<sup>301</sup> Scott, A. (2022) Interview with author, 25 Feb.

<sup>302</sup> Panos, L. (2010) Realism and Politics in Alienated Space: Trevor Griffiths’s Plays of the 1970s in the Television Studio, *New Theatre Quarterly*, (26)3, 283.

<sup>303</sup> Former professional teachers who wrote for PFT, or Play for Tomorrow, include: Alan Bleasdale, John Challen, Brian Clark, Brian Glover, Trevor Griffiths, Barry Reckord, Willy Russell, Neville Smith, Peter Terson, David Turner, Colin Welland and Michael Wilcox. John Harvey-Flint became a teacher *after* writing his PFT. University lecturers associated with PFT include Christopher Bigsby, Malcolm Bradbury and John Wain.

<sup>304</sup> Garner Jr., S.B. (1999) *Trevor Griffiths: Politics, Drama, History*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 21-26; see also Panos (2010) op. cit. 281; Panos, L. (2013) Trevor Griffiths’ Absolute Beginners: Socialist Humanism and the Television Studio, *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, (10)1, 154.

<sup>305</sup> Griffiths, T. (1988) *Collected Plays for Television*. London: Faber and Faber, 126

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.* 128. This patronising view was forwarded by elitist right-wingers and didactic, Hoggart-influenced left-wingers. See Chapter 3 for fuller quotation of Williams’s perspective on audiences.

<sup>307</sup> Garner op. cit. 115; Toon, E. (2014) The Machinery of Authoritarian Care - Dramatising Breast Cancer Treatment in 1970s Britain, *Social History of Medicine*, (27)3, 561-562.

provided the basis for Griffiths's play, originally titled 'Maiming the Parts', which, on theatre critic Kenneth Tynan's advice, Griffiths renamed *TTN*.<sup>308</sup> The fictional Christine Potts (Alison Steadman) goes in for a routine Biopsy; like Jan, she undergoes an axillary clearance mastectomy, about which she is kept ignorant.<sup>309</sup> In winter 1974-75, Michael Lindsay-Hogg was enlisted as *TTN*'s director. He had previously directed Griffiths's *All Good Men* (1974) and *Occupations* (1974); after completing work on Granada's *Occupations*, he read the script of *TTN* on the train back to London from Manchester.<sup>310</sup> Lindsay-Hogg found *TTN* 'long, strong, brutal and compassionate'; and 'such an emotionally draining' play that he postponed rehearsals until Spring.<sup>311</sup> In May-June 1975, producer Ann Scott and script editor Colin Tucker, to facilitate a truthful picture of current NHS care, enlisted people with specialist knowledge or experience, including women with experience of breast cancer like Joan Scott, as script readers.<sup>312</sup> While the readers expressed minor objections, they unanimously verified Griffiths's script's truthfulness.<sup>313</sup>

Lindsay-Hogg cast the 'wonderful' Alison Steadman, to capture Christine's 'confusion and bewilderment', and Jack Shepherd as Dr Pearce, for his 'commitment to the truth, his passion for what he believed and his terrific sense of humour'.<sup>314</sup> For Christine's husband Joe, Griffiths proposed Dave Hill, who, Lindsay-Hogg claims, has 'a real sense of empathy in his nature'.<sup>315</sup> This all-video production was shot in TC6 studio from 27-30 July 1975. Lindsay-Hogg loved the studio set-up, feeling it helps actors to perform in sequence, captures 'conversations on the move' and enables two or three minute sequences at a time, which better conveyed 'the pace the nurses worked at'.<sup>316</sup>

While Jan Griffiths's hospital experience was in or around Leeds, the production responsibly avoids specificity.<sup>317</sup> *TTN*'s generic Northern flavour is established via Steadman's non-localised Northern accent, Dave Hill's Mancunian inflections and Jack

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<sup>308</sup> Toon *ibid.* 564-565.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.* 564.

<sup>310</sup> Lindsay-Hogg, M. (2020) Email to author, 24 Aug.

<sup>311</sup> Lindsay-Hogg *ibid.* Dave Hill recalls *TTN*'s rehearsals taking about three weeks: Hill, D. (2020) Interview with author, 17 Apr.

<sup>312</sup> These included two cancer educators, two psychiatrists, one surgery lecturer and an activist; several of whom had findings on health care previously or subsequently published: the University Hospital of South Manchester's Dr Peter Maguire and the Middlesex's Dr Edward Chesser, alongside Action for Women's Advice Research and Education's (AWARE) Jill Rakusen: Toon *op. cit.* 565-567; Scott, J. (1976) T.V. BBC1, *Spare Rib*, Apr, 40.

<sup>313</sup> Toon *op. cit.* 567-568, 571; Scott, J. *ibid.*

<sup>314</sup> Lindsay-Hogg (2020) *ibid.* Griffiths and Lindsay-Hogg jointly cast Shepherd.

<sup>315</sup> Lindsay-Hogg, M. (2022b) Email to author, 19 Apr.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>317</sup> Toon, E. (2021) Email to author, 23 Nov.

Shepherd's Leeds tones.<sup>318</sup> Medical GP and prolific PFT actor and director Richard Wilson plays the Registrar.<sup>319</sup> *TTN* conveys contemporary multiculturalism via the receptive Nurse Chatterjee (Rebecca Mascarenhas) and the diligent Night Nurse (Angela Bruce): whose compassion Garner discerns.<sup>320</sup> The prolific designer Susan Spence's vividly verisimilar sets juxtapose formal wooden panels with floral bed curtains: the NHS hospital's forbidding Victorian environment is, tentatively, becoming more welcoming.

Female actors comprise 74.2% of *TTN*'s cast.<sup>321</sup> The ward's cross-generational Northern women display relaxed, liberal outlooks and agency. The Catholic Mrs Scully (Anne Dyson), a larger-than-life gin lover with a plain-speaking, deadpan idiolect, has had half of her stomach removed. Middle-class student Anna Jay (Julia Schofield) asks, semi-jokingly, for cannabis resin and is on the contraceptive pill. Joe, who brings flowers to Christine during his first visit, is easy-going, but helpless without her and struggling to look after their two children. There is an impressionistic realism in how loud moments are interspersed with silent longueurs. Surgeon Mr Staunton (Tony Steedman) and his medical team whisper to each other; their voices kept low in the sound mix: the viewer's difficulty in hearing mirrors Christine's ignorance and disorientation. *TTN*'s lack of contrived incident and an underscore underlines its stark, unvarnished truth.

However, *TTN* has a countervailing optimism, to avoid putting off viewers who may be potential breast cancer patients from seeking NHS help.<sup>322</sup> The production evades demonising the aloof Staunton and other NHS staff who embody the Victorian ethos that Jack Shepherd felt hospitals still had in 1975.<sup>323</sup> Shepherd's trainee Dr Pearce personifies idealistic change: talking to the patients informally, alluding to familiar popular culture and dressing casually: Christine quickly identifies him as 'the scruffy one'. Pearce sports an unbuttoned shirt, rolled-up sleeves and a trench-coat, while smoking and using idioms reassuring to the older Northern generation like 'daft 'apporth'. Pearce connects with older

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<sup>318</sup> Hill was born into a working-class background in Skipton, his father was a taper in the cotton industry: Hill, D. (2021) Interview with author, 22 Jan.

<sup>319</sup> At the Stables Theatre in Manchester, Wilson had played the lead in Griffiths's original stage-play *Occupations* (1970). Alongside discovering Griffiths, the Stables were the first to commission PFT writers Brian Clark, Arthur Hopcraft and Peter Ransley: Roose-Evans, J. (1996) *One Foot on the Stage: The Biography of Richard Wilson*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 93-94; Wyver, J. (2022b) Granada Television's experiment with The Stables Theatre Company, 1969-70, in: A. Wrigley & J. Wyver (eds.) *Screen plays: Theatre plays on British television*. Manchester University Press, 165.

<sup>320</sup> Garner op. cit. 116. This is part of a rounded portrayal of the NHS, which contrasts with *Eve*'s sole exemplary doctor, Mary.

<sup>321</sup> This is a higher proportion than other PFTs centring on NHS wards like *The Bouncing Boy* (55.6%) and *Baby Blues* (55.6%), *Our Flesh and Blood* (58.8%), *Minor Complications* (52%) and *John David* (1982: 73.3%).

<sup>322</sup> Some of Marje Proops's *Sunday Mirror* readers felt that *TTN* could have a dissuasive effect: Toon op. cit. 572.

<sup>323</sup> Shepherd (2022a) op. cit.

patients in this NHS ward and, implicitly, older PfT viewers, alongside younger viewers appreciative of his maverick spontaneity.

In protest at her situation, Christine locks herself in the lavatory, being found by Staff Nurse Brenton (Sheila Kelly and the Night Nurse, who enable *TTN*'s humanist resurgence. Pearce coaxes her out; in his office, over cocoa, Pearce listens to Christine and, unlike all other doctors, talks openly with her. Well after the play's hour-mark, he tells Christine that her breast was removed because she had a cancerous tumour. In an impassioned, didactic monologue, Pearce quotes from Hippocrates about the importance of medics communicating to be widely understood. Fulfilling the play's ethical necessity, Pearce tells Christine she will undergo radiotherapy and her chances of recovery are good. Younger NHS personnel like Pearce, Chatterjee and the Night Nurse represent an emergent tendency within the NHS to abandon its dispassionate paternalism and loosen up: implementing the findings of researcher-practitioners like Chesser, Anderson and Maguire.

*TTN* is a RAID, authenticated by real-life experiences, which appealed widely to viewers through its social realism (see Chapters 2 and 3). Poole and Wyver felt that *TTN* lacked Griffiths's customary political dimension.<sup>324</sup> As Ann Scott notes, *TTN* reached Griffiths's largest audience: via its 'accessible universal subject'.<sup>325</sup> It appealed widely beyond Griffiths's political drama serial *Bill Brand* (1976).<sup>326</sup> Evidently, the social *is* covertly political: *TTN* smuggles in challenging representations within the mainstream televisual flow. Griffiths's only part-female authored PfT incisively 'sets itself against the eroticizing of the female breast'.<sup>327</sup> Christine, when missing her breast, but still unaware of her condition, opens up a copy of the *Sun* newspaper and sees a Page Three 'girl' with bare breasts, which cruelly counterpoints Christine's situation. Silently and swiftly, she closes the paper: Steadman understatedly conveys her weary, impassive disgust. Ann Scott recalls that Jan Griffiths came to watch the recording and was 'very proud' that her experiences had 'borne some fruit'.<sup>328</sup>

While regarding *TTN* as overly journalistic, Poole and Wyver approve how its non-naturalistic detours subvert the norms of TV medical soaps *Emergency Ward 10* (ATV,

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<sup>324</sup> Poole, M. & Wyver, J. (1984) *Powerplays: Trevor Griffiths in Television*. London: BFI Publishing, 117.

<sup>325</sup> Scott, A. op. cit.

<sup>326</sup> According to BBC viewing barometers, *Bill Brand* averaged 2.49 million viewers, close to *The Rank and File* (see Chapter 3). Thanks to Ian Greaves for locating this data. According to Steven Fielding, JICTAR's figures for *Bill Brand* were significantly higher, especially in North East England: Fielding, S. (2020) Socialist Television Drama, Newspaper Critics and the Battle of Ideas During the Crisis of Britain's Post-War Settlement, *Twentieth Century British History*, (31)2, 241-242.

<sup>327</sup> Garner op. cit. 118. Garner notes how *TTN* anticipates Louise Page's stage play *Tissue* (1978).

<sup>328</sup> Scott, A. op. cit.

1957-67) and *General Hospital* (ATV, 1972-79).<sup>329</sup> *TTN*'s ASL is a fairly sedate 10.2. It adheres to multi-camera custom in faster editing of 'talking heads' scenes, while suggesting the sped-up temporality of loved-ones' visits, but Head cameraman Jim Atkinson also uses slow, steady movements within longer takes, achieving a rare mobility in the studio. Atkinson's use of a pedestal camera evokes the helpless Christine's point-of-view as she is wheeled down long corridors.<sup>330</sup>

At *TTN*'s climax, Christine, freed by her greater knowledge, jokes about her condition with Nurse Chatterjee. Then, five women on the ward, including Christine, Mrs Scully and Anna, share a covert, night-time gin drink, while the nurses play liar dice. In this *tableau vivant*, several of the women whisper 'bugger it!' as a cheery toast. Griffiths's published script has Christine utter 'Sod it!' while three others whisper 'fuck it' in unison.<sup>331</sup> Due to BBC1 Controller Bryan Cowgill's intervention, this final utterance was replaced by Christine's 'Here's looking at you, kid!' in mimicry of Pearce's earlier Humphrey Bogart impression.<sup>332</sup> Audible over the end credits is John Lennon's 'It's So Hard' (1971), which was Lindsay-Hogg's idea: 'the rawness of the guitar and the rasp in John's voice seemed to fit what Christine Potts had undergone'.<sup>333</sup> Countering a Marxist critique of *TTN*'s ending for being overly 'sentimental', Garner identified how the five women enact Griffiths's socialist humanist ideals, being a spontaneous community, built on shared experience, solidarity and mutual support.<sup>334</sup>

This contrasted starkly with a studio discussion in *Tonight* (1975), directly following *TTN*. According to one critic, this 'extraordinarily insensitive' debate did not invite comment from *any* women; a prefiguration of *Act of Rape*'s patriarchal discussion.<sup>335</sup> Producer Ann Scott ascribes *Tonight* to the BBC's obligation to grant doctors a right-of-reply to Griffiths's trenchant, humanist drama.<sup>336</sup> Mentioning Clive James's squeamish avoidance of his drama, Griffiths claims, incorrectly, that *TTN* was critically ignored: it received post-broadcast reviews or mentions in 55.6% of press publications, to 25% for *Eve*.<sup>337</sup> Peter Fiddick wanted *TTN* to be *more* terrifying; likewise, PfT dramatist Peter Prince wanted 'a vein of brilliant unfairness'.<sup>338</sup> However, Fiddick acknowledged the ethical rationale

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<sup>329</sup> Poole & Wyver op. cit. 117-118.

<sup>330</sup> Lindsay-Hogg (2022a) Email to author, 14 Apr.

<sup>331</sup> Griffiths (1988) op. cit. 176-177.

<sup>332</sup> Toon op. cit. 565.

<sup>333</sup> Lindsay-Hogg (2022a) op. cit. Lindsay-Hogg claims that Griffiths approved of his suggestion.

<sup>334</sup> Poole & Wyver op. cit. 117; Garner op. cit. 119.

<sup>335</sup> Jackson, M. (1975b) This Moll's sexy enough to make any male a chauvinist, *Daily Mail*, 4 Dec, 19.

<sup>336</sup> Scott, A. op. cit.

<sup>337</sup> Griffiths (1988) op. cit. 129; James, C. (1975e) Pounded by psychic energy, *Observer*, 7 Dec, 30.

<sup>338</sup> Fiddick, P. (1975) To have terrified the audience might have been effective to the truthful drama but might have cost real lives, *Guardian*, 8 Dec, 8; Prince, P. (1975) Soft Centre, *New Statesman*, 12 Dec, 766.

behind Griffiths's careful dramaturgy, criticising instead *Tonight's* dishonest framing of 'balance' in staging a 'debate' over *TTN*, seeing it as ridiculous that Griffiths was forced to defend his play, given that 'letting a single voice, individual integrity, make a statement' is *integral* to drama.<sup>339</sup>

Typically for PFT, Sylvia Clayton admired its verisimilar skill, while ignoring its ideological facets.<sup>340</sup> While Martin Jackson disapproved of Griffiths's instrumental use of his characters for his political message, Prince and Peter Lennon discerned its humanist theme of Christine's entrapment by an impersonal, dehumanising bureaucracy.<sup>341</sup> Chris Dunkley praised the didacticism of Pearce's Hippocrates-quoting speech, while perceptively commending Lindsay-Hogg's televisual 'impressionism' and close-ups.<sup>342</sup> Academic Brian Winston admired *TTN's* impressionistic drama for transcending TV documentary's politically-determined notions of 'balance': '[it] illuminated an area of our social life as no other television form could have done'.<sup>343</sup>

*TTN* received wider coverage than was normal for PFT. Consultant haematologist Michael Rose perceived the play's truth.<sup>344</sup> Joan Scott strongly criticised *Tonight* for its all-male panel composition, noting how a doctor's lofty defence of his right to withhold information concerning breast cancer proved Griffiths's drama's point.<sup>345</sup> Like others, Scott saw Pearce's speech as the play's crux, especially his imperative to Christine: 'Don't thank, demand!' Unlike mainstream critics, Scott interpreted *TTN* as a springboard for action, urging that 'we' agitate 'for a better health service', with patients in 'equal partnership' with doctors.<sup>346</sup> Beside this, Philip Purser's one-star assessment of *TTN's* 'social/historical/artistic interest' is crassly paltry.<sup>347</sup>

*TTN* received PFT's fifth-largest audience of 11.67 million, and an RI of 76: in PFT's highest twenty. Alison Steadman and Jack Shepherd are deeply proud of their work on *TTN*; it is Dave Hill's joint favourite PFT he was in, representing 'Trevor [...] at the height of his powers'.<sup>348</sup> The exceptional public reaction is evinced by the volume of letters and

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<sup>339</sup> Fiddick (1975) *ibid.*

<sup>340</sup> Clayton, S. (1975b) Cancer case turned into vivid drama, *Daily Telegraph*, 3 Dec, 14. Clayton claimed to personally recognise aspects of the hospital environment from her stay as a typhoid patient.

<sup>341</sup> Jackson *op. cit.*; Prince *op. cit.*; Lennon, P. (1975b) The people speak, *Sunday Times*, 7 Dec, 39.

<sup>342</sup> Dunkley, C. (1975b) Life's fitful fevers, *Financial Times*, 10 Dec, 3.

<sup>343</sup> Winston, B. (1975) Public and private medicine, *Listener*, 11 Dec, 793.

<sup>344</sup> Rose *op. cit.*, 9.

<sup>345</sup> Scott, J. *op. cit.*

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>347</sup> Halliwell, L. & Purser, P. (1985) *Halliwell's Television Companion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London: Paladin/Granada, xx, 629. Purser did not review it after broadcast in his regular *Sunday Telegraph* column.

<sup>348</sup> Steadman, A. (2022) Interview with author, 24 Jan; Shepherd *op. cit.*; Hill, D. *op. cit.* Hill's other joint-favourite is Paula Milne's *A Sudden Wrench*.

phone calls the BBC, Trevor Griffiths and Marje Poops received about it.<sup>349</sup> *TTN* empathetically immerses the viewer in a breast cancer patient's experiences, while being socially responsible. This socialist humanist drama used validating input by health care reformers to support its highly skilled direction, acting, set and sound design. This collaborative play was the apotheosis of PFT's popular progressive drama, fusing realism and impressionism to deeply affect viewers and spearhead a shift in attitudes concerning breast cancer care.

## **5.5. Conclusion**

Quantitative analysis supports Horace Ové's point; like wider TV, PFT failed to present marginalised Black or Asian perspectives on a regular basis. But the strand's strong Jewish voices – often left-wing and anarchistic – complement Black creators Ové and Barry Reckord's high quality, distinctive socialist humanist dramas. PFT portrayed gay and transsexual characters fairly well, quantitatively, while occasionally succumbing to stereotyping, but, by 1982-84, gay men figured in a more unremarkable, less sensationalist manner. *Even Solomon* was extraordinarily ahead-of-its-time in its educative, empathetic drama of a transgender trajectory and forms an eloquent argument against essentialism. Writer Andrew Taylor depicted sexual difference originally: beyond transgender woman Susan's self-discovery, it conveyed her asexual aversion to an increasingly over-sexualised culture.

In 1970-77 PFTs, grammar-schooled male writers from working-class backgrounds held sway, with Trevor Griffiths the intellectual trailblazer, though PFTs like *Only Make Believe* and *DAIS* displayed deep limitations in gender representation. While PFT was sometimes intensely androcentric, women actors consistently made outstanding contributions, especially from 1974-77, when *TTN*, Griffiths's most gynocentric PFT was broadcast. In 1977-84, PFT employed far more women writers; its feminist upturn in 1981-82 was exemplified by Marcella Evaristi's witty female-ensemble comedy-drama *Eve*, centred on middle-class Glasgow women. Here, PFT expanded its representational repertoire, concurrently with male working-class writing becoming rarer, amid emergent Thatcherism.

Several PFTs recoiled from a contemporary Britain they depict as afflicted by institutional and everyday racism. Philip Martin and Leon Griffiths created more active Black and Asian protagonists, while David Edgar foregrounded Khera's socialist trade union activism. Barry Reckord's *ITBC* reproaches English Powellism, while channelling

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<sup>349</sup> Griffiths (1988) op. cit. 128-129; Toon *ibid.* 572.

Jamaica's Black working-class resentment at their exploitation by a Black middle-class elite. Reckord's depiction of Jonathan's eloquent socialist humanist rhetoric *and* revolutionary Black Power has a melancholy pessimism. PFT progressed in its depictions of different sexualities: from covert secrecy, through iconoclastic openness, to an everyday acceptance well ahead of public opinion. With grounded hopefulness, *Even Solomon* conveys that prejudice is ineradicable among insecure bigots, but that most people can learn, given astute and humane communication.

PfT depicted public and private worlds as intrinsically interrelated. A significant number of PfTs emphasise the prevalence of male violence in society, several of which forward overtly feminist responses. These unsparingly depict unacceptable male behaviour, advancing varying feminist perspectives. *Eve* conveys a male violence and obliviousness which is chronically central in certain PfTs, but which Evaristi's women protagonists transcend through their skill, empathy and agency. By 1984, PfT often depicted working-class life as embattled, bleak and generating destructive masculine behaviours. *Eve* reflects a shift to a liberal valuing of individual idiosyncrasies and friendships and away from a socialist respecting of group solidarity. While both *TTN* and *Eve* centre on groups of women, the former depicts their shared socialist humanism in an NHS ward, while the latter represents women's liberal humanism via their specific friendships and enmities.

Jonathan's speech in *ITBC* articulates historical consciousness of slavery, alongside working-class Jamaicans' current shared economic grievances. Reckord's picture of pervasive unemployment causing resentment and violence anticipates how PfTs in 1979-84 depicted geopolitics as Thatcher's reign began. PfT shows attitudes to sexuality as gradually opening up, in *TGATK* and the especially supportive domestic group spaces of *Commitments*. However, *Coming Out's* Lewis Duncan and *Commitments's* Buffo express dual cynicisms – from neoliberal and left-wing anarchist perspectives – towards collective group identity, which is mocked via the former's stereotypical portrayal of Gerald. In *Even Solomon*, Susan firstly becomes aware of her difference in private; yet, her brave decision to publicly self-declare as transgender is facilitated within the welcoming public space of Jake's clothes shop, where she *and viewers* receive a humanist education through expert studio acting.

Several PfTs represent workers according to 'Us and Them' class divides, in private work spaces and open public spaces; occasionally, workers become more politicised, as in *Leeds United!* In Griffiths's socialist humanist *TTN*, the cross-class group of women turn the cold Victorian NHS ward into a public space of communal solidarity and transgressive laughter.

Through *mise-en-scène* and dialogue, many PfTs feature oblique and explicit social criticism of the objectification of the female body in public work spaces which cater to male workers' gazes. The men responsible for pin-up or Page Three 'girl' images were firstly treated empathetically, then obliquely censured, as implied in Christine's reaction to the *Sun* newspaper in *TTN*, culminating in feminist challenges articulated by a range of seen and unseen women in 1981-84, led by Kate in *Sorry* and Barbara in *No Visible Scar*. In *Eve*, different ideas of success and confession are contested in liminal public-private spaces, including in humorous flashbacks.

Ové, Sanderson, Wandor and Garnett's linked diagnoses of British culture's pervasive marginalisation of people due to their ethnicity, sexuality, gender and class are mostly supported by several para-textual BBC discussion programmes in 1975-79.<sup>350</sup> These foregrounded white middle-class heterosexual male 'experts', at the expense of women and gay men. However, across TWP and PfT history, there was a marked shift away from representing marginal identities as exotic, marginal or a 'problem', towards an everyday acceptance of difference.

Aesthetically, these are *video* case-studies: *ITBC* and *TTN* entirely, while *Even Solomon* and *Eve* are video-led hybrids, with the latter deploying OB's everydayness. They all demonstrate PfT's informative potential, while capturing viewers through their familiar, recognisable public and private settings – including an NHS hospital, a bank and a school. While this chapter has foregrounded several exceptional individual contributions, these PfTs were achieved through teamwork, including actors and designers. In the three 1970s case-studies, actors deliver didactic, educative dialogue within verisimilar studio spaces to convey informational and emotional truths that resonated widely. Calvin Lockhart's delivery of Jonathan's speech in *ITBC* was its highlight for vanguard viewers, who persisted with an unfamiliar drama that many others quit. Adapting Eddie Waters's insight concerning comedy, these PfTs were at the vanguard of TV drama in incorporating fresh, previously marginalised perspectives to its repertoire, presenting millions of viewers with changed situations.

The following synoptic conclusion assimilates insights from each chapter, to address this Ph.D.'s principal research questions. It highlights areas of PfT and single drama history

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<sup>350</sup> However, an *In Vision* (1974) discussion following *Leeds United!* included several women involved in the real-life strike that inspired Welland's PfT. They strongly praised *Leeds United!* while having qualms about women strikers' bad language, feeling personally misrepresented. The play's director sees this attitude as a front, and testifies to the veracity of women's strong language on the Leeds textiles factory shop-floor he visited during research: Battersby, R. (2014) *Another Look*. Self-published: Solentro, 42.

that still need exploring, while assessing the thesis' wider relevance to British society and TV drama today.

## Conclusions

This particular play was a stark and bitter exploration of a desperate situation. I'm sure you would agree that all television drama cannot be cosy, pretty, and comforting; there has to be a range (Elizabeth Smart on *Victims of Apartheid*).<sup>1</sup>

This thesis, and its appendices, have charted a history of PFT, conducting extensive quantitative and qualitative analysis of its 294 one-off dramas in order to communicate original findings, to rectify previous hazy myths about PFT. Here are some final summaries and reflections, alongside suggestions for future research that could build on this study's work.

PFT has often been seen as a beacon of diversity, quality and artistic freedom: part of a lost 'Golden Age' of TV drama, nurtured amid wider cultural democratisation. Journalists canonise the PFTs of Mike Leigh, Dennis Potter and Jack Rosenthal, while academics valorise those by Tony Garnett, Trevor Griffiths, Ken Loach and John McGrath. While social realism was PFT's somewhat predominant mode, it also featured comedy, docudrama, horror, melodrama and science fiction and achieved its height of popular modernism and political radicalism in 1974-75.

PFT used film and video aesthetics, reflecting cinematic *and* theatrical approaches. Three-fifths of PFT was shot on video, though key creators' cinematic aspirations and Head of Drama Shaun Sutton – who had achieved a prudent, fruitful balance between video and film – departing precipitated the single-play's demise. PFT's video-studio majority were human-centric dramas, which discursively granted primacy to conversations and usually lacked underscores: this refusal to manipulate viewers' emotions was apt given that PFT clearly fits John Ellis's designation of 'the most prestigious drama based on filmic or theatric modes of attention'.<sup>2</sup> PFT's video-tape was edited somewhat more slowly than its 16mm film, but both aesthetics' ASLs grew during 1978-81, with the directors of *The Spongers* and *Billy* creating a distinctive sedate Brechtian documentary style.

Critics venerated comedy-dramas by Nichols, Clark and Rosenthal alongside Dennis Potter's *Blue Remembered Hills* as realist Art, which they appreciated in literary connoisseur-like terms for observing truths about humanity. Critics rarely branded PFT 'depressing', barring conservatives like Last, North, Purser and Thomas, or jocular neo-

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<sup>1</sup> Smart, E. (1978) Letter to A.R. Burston [NVLA], 22 Nov. BBC WAC, R/78/2348.

<sup>2</sup> Ellis, J. (1992) *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London: Routledge, 163.

critics. By 1984, PFT was taken less seriously, though it broadly retained pre-eminence in the national conversation concerning TV. While Philip Purser lost patience with PFT, Seán Day-Lewis, Peter Fiddick and Shaun Usher were its consistent, thoughtful critical champions. In spring 1975, PFT's audience closely matched UK demography; a time when it pleased working-class men most, middle-class women least. Most viewers admired narratively clear PFTs with recognisable characters, like the Nichols-Clark-Rosenthal type. Largely, PFT viewers expected stark, unpalatable truths, which social realist RAID centrepieces of PFT's yearly output, from *Edna*, *The Inebriate Woman* (1971) to *Minor Complications* (1980), provided: achieving vast average audiences and Reaction Indices.

PFT represented Greater London most frequently, while screening Scotland, Northern Ireland and Northern England more from 1974: a devolutionary turn facilitated by producers: Rose in Birmingham, Maclaren and Graham in Glasgow and Zeiger and Parr in Belfast, alongside Garnett's and Trodd's excursions. However, PFT neglected Wales and North East England. It often depicted non-metropolitan life as bleak and limited, with protagonists desiring escape to metropolitan areas or abroad. Unlike a moralistic minority, most PFT viewers and press reviewers appreciated PFT's tough presentation of vigorous, changing contemporary life.

PFT was partially prone to TV's neglect in representing different identities that Horace Ové, Terry Sanderson, Michelene Wandor and Tony Garnett perceived. While PFT substantially improved in employing women writers in 1977-82, it included relatively few Black or Asian writers or directors. However, PFT richly portrayed the working-class majority, through PFTs set in cities like Belfast, Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham and London. During 1972-81, an analytical multicultural socialism infused many PFTs, especially those by Barry Reckord, Nemone Lethbridge, Bernard Kops, David Edgar, Barrie Keeffe, Trevor Griffiths, Ové and H.O. Nazareth. Griffiths's truthful, socialist humanist *Through the Night (TTN)* offered a corrective basis for future NHS breast cancer care. PFT's representational emphasis shifted from working-class men, towards middle-class women, via writers Rosemary Davies, Rose Tremain, Carol Bunyan and Marcella Evaristi and actors Meg Davies and Barbara Flynn embodied an embattled feminist agency. Analytical, emotive socialist humanism in *In the Beautiful Caribbean (ITBC)* and *TTN* gave way to the liberal humanism of *Even Solomon* and *Eve Set the Balls of Corruption Rolling*, which depict learning and friendship in retail and leisure spaces.

Many PFT writers had acerbic tones, ambiguously verging on cynicism: Alan Bleasdale, Thomas Clarke, Alma Cullen, Andrew Davies, Leon Griffiths, James Andrew Hall, Ron

Hutchinson, Peter McDougall and William Trevor. Others migrated to the political Right (Robin Chapman), had a nihilistic anarchism (Charles Wood) or were centrists (Derek Lister, Andy McSmith and Tony Perrin).<sup>3</sup> PFT's political complexity is clear from January 1980 alone: *Chance of a Lifetime*, an open text, concludes with ambiguous anger and stoicism within a Teesside family and community affected by the Troubles. *Thicker than Water* respects military service in the Second World War, is immersed in the polyglot Shakespearean tradition and welcomes Britain's European destiny, transcending blood and soil essentialism in as eloquently pluralist a way as *Penda's Fen*.

Clearly, PFT was not, by any fair measure, left-wing propaganda.<sup>4</sup> However, it did, to paraphrase Alan Plater, show people what was going on across the UK, and, increasingly, outside its borders, as *ITBC* demonstrates and it viscerally represented Apartheid's evil.<sup>5</sup> A selective tradition of PFTs represent its humanist core. These can be socialist – Jim Allen, Carol Bunyan, Trevor Griffiths, Stewart Parker – or liberal – Andrew Taylor, Marcella Evaristi, Rose Tremain, Janey Preger – while Arthur Hopcraft, John Hopkins, Paula Milne and Colin Welland's varied work transcends categorisation, sometimes fusing liberalism and socialism. These writers are critical towards all institutions, but are generally open to their reform. Even PFT's most idealistic writers were pessimistic about radical change, though moments in 1972-79 PFTs by Reckord, McGrath, Welland, Griffiths, Kops, Edgar and Keeffe movingly show socialist humanist ways forward.<sup>6</sup>

They dramatise individuals and groups, but, in contrast to laughable journalistic short-hands for PFT, they avoid all roseate idealisation. PFT preserves for today past representations of forgotten or marginalised characters: saving the beveller, the feminist existentialist intellectual, the nostalgic old Jewish boxing manager, the Jamaican civil rights lawyer and the cynical gay retired civil servant from the condescension of posterity. In Hopcraft's *The Reporters*, the Dickens-loving veteran journalist Vic Thatcher (Robert Urquhart) describes the *Daily Express* newspaper as a 'bullying [...] Mr Bumble of the business, defender of the strong against the weak'. PFT's dramas-from-below sometimes strongly communicated an 'Us and Them' class consciousness which defended the

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<sup>3</sup> Malcolm Bradbury seems an exact midpoint between Wood and the latter trio, as his conservative satirical tendency is combined, complicatedly, with liberal or social democratic values.

<sup>4</sup> PFT regularly includes criticisms of working-class parenting and comprehensive education and it could caustically satirise self-serving liberal do-gooders, trade unionists, feminists or, most fairly, the Workers' Revolutionary Party.

<sup>5</sup> This characterises BBC employee Elizabeth Smart's response on behalf of BBC Plays to a NVLA complaint about *Victims of Apartheid*, which had graphic scenes of torture in Apartheid South Africa: Smart, E. op. cit. Nevertheless, writer Thomas Clarke includes acerbic satire of London liberal do-gooders.

<sup>6</sup> PFT's Left-aligned writers include ten socialist analysts of multicultural Britain (see Chapter 5), the writers of PFT's three Secret War histories (see Appendix 7), Dusty Hughes, Doug Lucie and Dominic Behan; Leslie Stewart provided sincere liberal-left responses to Thatcherism as it unfolded.

powerless. Frequently, PFT provided stark, critical representations of distant or violent husbands, situated within a cross-class masculine culture where images of naked women are commonplace in work spaces and print culture.

PFT's brusque radicalism and popular humanism is perceptible in key writer-actor Colin Welland's role in the feature-film *Sweeney!* (1977). Publicity material describes Welland's character Chadwick as 'the influential and outspoken editor of a top political journal who openly voices his distrust of the Energy Minister's smooth-tongued P.R.O.'<sup>7</sup> Welland claimed his socialism was emotional rather than theoretical; PFT is partly defined by wariness of the smooth-tongued and empathy with the underdog.<sup>8</sup> PFT possessed a toughness and range, which, in Raymond Williams's terms, trusted viewers' intelligence.<sup>9</sup> As Rob Ritchie claimed, *Chance of a Lifetime*'s vast audience 'confounded those who expected the audience to switch off' from its bleak topicality.<sup>10</sup> PFT offered outspoken, educative perspectives that appealed most of all to vanguard viewers desiring a fairer range of voices than were presented in the preceding *BBC Nine O'Clock News*.

During this Ph.D. study, PFT's profile has been raised significantly following its fiftieth anniversary. Vital parallel work is being done by Vicky Ball in interviewing further women writers, and other significant PFT creators, about gender and PFT and Katie Crosson in analysing counter-intuitive topics like sentimentality and joy in PFT. Relatively unexplored areas which remain include: PFT actors' performance styles and vocal delivery, PFT's position within the televisual flow, its representations of mental health, neuro-divergence, disability, pleasures and desires, and how photographs and TV sets feature within its *mise-en-scène*.<sup>11</sup> Amid necessary current attempts to decolonise the curriculum, more attention is needed concerning PFT's non-UK representations, to build on Chapter 4 and Chapter 5's case-studies. As I write, the impacts of the climate crisis are impossible for us to ignore. I acknowledge this study's elision of PFT's ecological contexts; for example, its productions' material impacts, and how it portrays non-human species and

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<sup>7</sup> EMI Film Distributors Ltd. (n.d.) Synopsis Sheet: *Sweeney!* Popular Film and Television Archive, University of Northumbria.

<sup>8</sup> Madden, P. & Wilson, D. (1975) *The Communal Touch: The Television Plays of Colin Welland*, *Sight and Sound*, Spring, 117.

<sup>9</sup> Williams, R. (1965) *The Long Revolution*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 361.

<sup>10</sup> Ritchie, R. (1984) *Out of the North*, in: Hutchinson, R. *Rat In The Skull*. London: Methuen, 5.

<sup>11</sup> There could be study of the comparative influences on PFT of Armchair Theatre and Play of the Month, in terms of performance style and vocal delivery. I tried to source BBC news bulletins that preceded PFT, but this proved difficult. Helen Wheatley noted the prevalence of photographs within PFT in a viewing group session. Keith Howes highlighted limitations of Chapter 3, when asking whether I had paid the same attention to disabled people or travellers' reception of PFT as I had to gay and feminist opinion: Howes, K. (2022) Email to author, 8 Feb.

environmental perspectives. Environmentalism's lack of centrality in practically all PFTs is itself significant.<sup>12</sup>

Alongside illuminating under-analysed PFTs by Elaine Feinstein, Marcella Evaristi, Brian Glover and Andrew Taylor, this study has consistently identified Hopcraft, McGrath, Welland, Trevor Griffiths, David Rudkin and Stewart Parker as crucial guiding spirits of PFT's pluralistic humanism.<sup>13</sup> Having yet to watch or read camera scripts of over 50 PFTs, I clearly have many more obscure gems to uncover. While Chapter 2 highlighted PFT directors' cutting paces and stylistics, deeper systematic assessment of PFT's visual style is required. While this thesis occasionally analyses how producers Eyre, Matheson, McDonald, Prem, Shubik and Trodd's tastes influenced PFT's form and content, this requires more study – *especially* how Innes Lloyd's eclectic mainstream productions show PFT working through contemporary feelings about difficult issues.

Early in this Ph.D., PFT's voluminous output meant that the process of tracking down copies of PFTs to watch, and camera scripts to read, was arduous. This would have been impossible without certain key people and institutions (see Acknowledgements). I am honoured to have spoken to so many practitioners from a range of job roles; this collective task is ever more urgent for scholars of 1950s-80s TV, considering such practitioners' advancing years. Analysing the sort of contributions Jacmel Dent claims that below-the-line workers made to productions requires work in gathering diverse people's testimonies.

In British TV scholarship, further work needs doing on regionalism and exceptional writers and directors like Carol Bunyan, Alan Plater, Colin Welland, Michael Wilcox, Piers Haggard, Jane Howell and Michael Lindsay-Hogg. Others could build on my model of scholarship deployed in this Ph.D. to construct longitudinal studies of Armchair Theatre, The Wednesday Play, Second City Firsts, Centre Play, BBC2 Playhouse, Armchair Thriller, Film on Four, Screen Two, ScreenPlay, The Play On One and 4 Play, to contextualise PFT more deeply. Non-UK single-drama strands, and European telefilms, also need investigating: to discern whether PFT was singular or archetypal.

Helped by Network, Box of Broadcasts and the BBC's liberalising attitude towards its archive, we can stop bemoaning 1960s-70s junking, and analyse the actually-existing majority of 1970s-80s single-drama output: alongside 89.6% of PFT, 60.2% of Second City

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<sup>12</sup> However, certain 1971-75 PFTs by Julia Jones, Elaine Feinstein and Alan Bennett have a subterranean green element, in their Leavisite scepticism about the impacts of change and 'progress' on human, urban life.

<sup>13</sup> Regrettably, a planned case-study of Parker's *Iris in the Traffic*, *Ruby in the Rain* (1981) had to be shelved for space reasons.

Firsts and 81.8% of Centre Play, *all* 112 BBC2 Playhouse dramas exist.<sup>14</sup> Further detailed analysis of TV's shift from the play to the film would help inform decisions about whether economically cost-effective, regionally democratic single-plays should be on TV.

Should PFT return? Alan Bennett replied, with customary pessimism: 'Fat chance'.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps it is not needed. PFT's thoughtful, tough and entertaining spirit lives in contemporary longer-form dramas by Michaela Coel and Kayleigh Llewellyn, and in comedy-dramas by Daisy Haggard, Tim Crouch, Toby Jones, Stephen Merchant and Sophie Willan; all these have particularity and civic vigour.<sup>16</sup> James Graham's ambitious *Sherwood* (2022) boldly dramatises the historical legacy of the 1984-85 Miners' Strike in the East Midlands. However, Stefan Golaszewski's sedately-paced *Marriage* (2022) is more perceptive about contemporary British life: its humanistic drama felt in direct descent from Bunyan, Hopcraft, Nichols and Welland.<sup>17</sup> Bernard Kops wishes that PFT 'would return in all its differences'.<sup>18</sup> If PFT *does* return, the aforementioned talented writers, alongside many others, could create challenging single-dramas, with varied protagonists, which transcend the safe formulae of true-life crime or 'cops and docs' dramas.<sup>19</sup>

As I argue in Appendix 6, PFT presents an alternative national heritage that diverse ranges of people can identify with. Clearly, no one would appreciate or enjoy every extant PFT; however, everyone alive now in Britain would like at least one PFT – and many would like more. When the UK's Conservative government is dangerously jeopardising the Good Friday Agreement and criminalising protest, like Zikky within *ITBC*, PFT speaks to us *directly*. In Barry Reckord's play, working-class people afflicted by inflationary price rises and unemployment wrestle with the limits of reasoned non-violence. Cautionary PFTs set in Northern Ireland and elsewhere convey how noisy dissent, disruption and conciliation are essential to our democratic health. *Even Solomon* offers reflection and empathy, unlike many current over-heated and under-educated 'debates' over transgender identity.

PFT possibly contained more tonal variety than any other British TV programme in history. In early 1979 alone, it presented Queenie Watts learning radically, Helen Mirren playing a

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<sup>14</sup> While lower figures of 40.7 and 43.8% of Armchair Theatre and The Wednesday Play exist, this still means that a combined total of 248 dramas survive from these crucial strands; while, for the latter, the BBC WAC holds most of the junked majority's camera scripts on micro-film.

<sup>15</sup> Bennett, A. (2020) Letter to author, 4 Mar.

<sup>16</sup> During this Ph.D. study, *I May Destroy You* (2020), *In My Skin* (2018-21), *Back to Life* (2019- ), *Don't Forget the Driver* (2019), *The Outlaws* (2021- ) and *Alma's Not Normal* (2020- ) have all been broadcast.

<sup>17</sup> TV critic Ally Ross disagrees, comparing *Marriage* to 'a dose of monkeypox' in a direct echo of James Thomas's anti-PFT rhetoric in 1976-77: Ross, A. (2022) Saving Yourself for Marriage? In a word: Don't, *The Sun*, 26 Aug, 13 [online] Available at: **Lexis Nexis** [accessed: 27/08/2022].

<sup>18</sup> Kops, B. (2020) Email to author, via Hannah Burman, 15 Jul.

<sup>19</sup> My many interviewees' crowd wisdom is that, for a strand that aims to do what PFT did to succeed, it should avoid using the illustrious PFT name and have a fresh title.

child, John Grieve performing a bizarre music-hall turn and David Daker iterating a prolonged monologue of class resentment. Different producers made PFT hard-hitting or recondite. PFT writers Jim Allen, Alan Bleasdale, Leon Griffiths, Philip Martin and Rita May appealed to fans of Hollywood cinema, Northern club comedy or *Minder* (1979-84). But PFT's DNA also contained integral literature, radio and theatre components, which, alongside its contemporaneity, gave it a unique edge and range unmatched by most series or serials. As Ram John Holder argues, the BBC used to provide 'A great service of Plays for Today': this was a public service we should all remember.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Holder, R.J. (2021) Interview with author, 17 Aug.

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The following filmography, radiography and teleography include all films, television and radio programmes referred to in the Ph.D. itself. Radio or TV strands which showed one-off dramas, plays or films are listed with their titles de-italicised, as in the Ph.D. text itself.

## **Filmography**

*Akenfield* (UK, 1974, dir. Peter Hall)  
*Bait* (UK, 2019 dir. Mark Jenkin)  
*Battleship Potemkin* (Soviet Union, 1925, dir. Sergei M. Eisenstein)  
*Broken Blossoms* (US, 1919, dir. D.W. Griffith)  
*Chariots of Fire* (UK, 1981, dir. Hugh Hudson)  
*Children Are Watching Us, The* (ITA, 1943, dir. Vittorio De Sica)  
*Claire's Knee* (FRA, 1970, dir. Éric Rohmer)  
*A Crazy, Mixed-up Kid* (UK, 2020, dir. Vic Pratt), BFI Flipside 041: **Short Sharp Shocks**  
[BFIB1396] BluRay extra.  
*Die Hard* (US, 1988, dir. John McTiernan)  
*Dreamchild* (UK, 1985, dir. Gavin Millar)  
*Dressed to Kill* (US, 1980, dir. Brian De Palma)  
*Eclipse, The [L'Eclisse]* (ITA, 1962, dir. Michelangelo Antonioni)  
*Fatherland* (UK/GER, 1986, dir. Ken Loach)  
*French Connection, The* (US, 1971, dir. William Friedkin)  
*Frightmare* (UK, 1974, dir. Pete Walker)  
*From Beyond the Grave* (UK, 1974, dir. Kevin Connor)  
*Godsend, The* (UK, 1980, dir. Gabrielle Beaumont)  
*Godzilla* (US, 1998, dir. Roland Emmerich)  
*Guardsman, The* (US, 1931, dir. Sidney Franklin)  
*Halloween* (US, 1978, dir. John Carpenter)  
*Handsworth Songs* (UK, 1986, dir. John Akomfrah)  
*Hidden Agenda* (UK, 1990, dir. Ken Loach)  
*House of Mortal Sin* (UK, 1975, dir. Pete Walker)  
*House of Whipcord* (UK, 1974, dir. Pete Walker)  
*Illusive Crime* (UK, 1975, dir. Richard Woolley)  
*Kes* (UK, 1969, dir. Ken Loach)  
*Looks and Smiles* (UK, 1981, dir. Ken Loach)  
*Nightcleaners, The* (UK, 1975, dir. The Berwick Street Collective [Marc Karlin, Mary Kelly, James Scott & Humphrey Trevelyan])  
*O Lucky Man!* (UK, 1973, dir. Lindsay Anderson)  
*O.M.* (UK, 1990, dir. Emyln Williams)  
*Peeping Tom* (UK, 1960, dir. Michael Powell)  
*Playing Away* (UK, 1986, dir. Horace Ové)  
*Pressure* (UK, 1976, dir. Horace Ové)  
*Private Enterprise, A* (UK, 1974, dir. Peter K. Smith)  
*Riddles of the Sphinx, The* (UK, 1977, dir. Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen)  
*Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (UK, 1986, dir. Alan Clarke)  
*Rosemary's Baby* (US, 1968, dir. Roman Polanski)  
*Sapphire* (UK, 1959, dir. Basil Dearden)  
*Sorrow and the Pity, The* (FRA/WGER/SWI, 1969, dir. Marcel Ophuls)  
*Star Wars* (US, 1977, dir. George Lucas)  
*Sweeney!* (UK, 1977, dir. David Wickes)  
*Symptoms* (UK, 1974, dir. José Ramón Larraz)  
*Ten Bob in Winter* (UK, 1963, dir. Lloyd Reckord)  
*Terminator, The* (US, 1984, dir. James Cameron)

*Tickle Me* (US, 1965, dir. Norman Taurog)  
*Trainspotting* (UK, 1996, dir. Danny Boyle)  
*Victim* (UK, 1961, dir. Basil Dearden)

## **Radiography**

Afternoon Theatre (BBC Home Service/BBC Radio 4, 1961-84)  
— *Under the Hammer* (tx. 11 Jan 1983)  
*Archive on 4: Play for Today* (Just Radio & BFI for BBC Radio 4, 17 Oct 2020)  
Drama Now (BBC Radio 3, 1972-96)  
— *Cries from Casement as his Bones are Brought to Dublin* (tx. 4 Feb 1973)  
*Lady's Not for Burning* (tx. BBC Home Service, 17 Apr 1950)  
*Northern Drift, The* (BBC Home Service/Network Three/BBC Radio 3/BBC Radio 4, 1964-81)

## **Teleography**

*Act of Rape* (BBC2, 22 Jan 1977)  
*All in the Family* (Tandem Productions for CBS, 1971-79 [BBC1/2, 1971-75])  
*Alma's Not Normal* (Expectation Entertainment for BBC2, 2020- )  
*Are You Being Served?* (BBC1, 1972-85)  
*Arena – Theatre: Playwrights of the 70s* (BBC2, 15 Jun 1977)  
Armchair Cinema (Euston Films for ITV, 1974-80)  
Armchair Mystery Theatre (ABC for ITV, 1960-65)  
Armchair Theatre (ABC for ITV, 1956-68; Thames for ITV, 1969-74)  
— *Folk Singer, The* (tx. 7 Nov 1972)  
— *Hot Summer Night* (tx. 1 Feb 1959)  
— *Lena, O My Lena* (tx. 25 Sep 1960)  
Armchair Thriller (Thames/Southern for ITV, 1978-81)  
*Artemis 81* (BBC1, 29 Dec 1981)  
*Avengers, The* (ABC for ITV, 1961-69)  
*Back to Life* (Two Brothers Pictures for BBC3/BBC1, 2019- )  
*Beiderbecke Affair, The* (Yorkshire Television for ITV, 1985)  
*Beiderbecke Connexion, The* (Yorkshire Television for ITV, 1988)  
*Beiderbecke Tapes, The* (Yorkshire Television for ITV, 1987)  
*Big Boys* (Roughcut TV & Little a productions for Channel 4, 2022)  
*Big Brother* (Endemol/various for Channel 4, 2000-10; Channel 5, 2011-18)  
*Bill Brand* (Thames for ITV, 1976)  
*Black Mirror* (Zeppotron & House of Tomorrow for Channel 4, 2011-14; Netflix, 2016- )  
*Boys from the Blackstuff* (BBC2, 1982)  
*Brideshead Revisited* (Granada for ITV, 1981)  
*BBC Nine O'Clock News, The* (BBC1, 1970-2000)  
BBC Television Shakespeare, The (BBC2, 1978-85)  
— *Merchant of Venice, The* (tx. 17 Dec 1980)  
BBC2 Playhouse (BBC2, 1974-83)  
*C.A.T.S. Eyes* (TVS for ITV, 1985-87)  
Centre Play (BBC2, 1973-77)  
*Changing Rooms* (Endemol Shine UK for BBC2/BBC1, 1996-2004, Channel 4, 2021- )  
*Charlie's Angels* (Spelling-Goldberg Productions for ABC, 1976-81 [ITV])  
*Citizen '63* (BBC Television, 1963-64)  
*Civilisation* (BBC2, 1969)  
*Coast* (BBC Birmingham & The Open University for BBC2, 2005-16)  
*Colony, The* (BBC1, 16 Jun 1964)  
*Coronation Street* (Granada for ITV, 1960- )

*Crezz, The* (Thames for ITV, 1976)  
*Crossroads* (ATV for ITV, 1964-81, Central for ITV, 1982-88; Carlton Television for ITV, 2001-03)  
*Crown Court* (Granada for ITV, 1972-84, 2006-07)  
*Culloden* (BBC1, 15 Dec 1964)  
*Dallas* (Lorimar for CBS, 1978-91 [BBC1, 1978-91])  
*Desmond's* (Humphrey Barclay Productions for Channel 4, 1989-94)  
*Days of Hope* (BBC1, 1975)  
*Doctor At Large* (LWT for ITV, 1971)  
*Doctor Who* (BBC Television/BBC1, 1963-89, 2005- )  
*Don't Forget the Driver* (Sister Pictures for BBC2, 2019)  
*Dr. Finlay's Casebook* (BBC Television/BBC1, 1962-71)  
*Drama Documentary: Imagining the Truth* (BBC4, 28 Nov 2005)  
*Drama Out of a Crisis* (Illuminations for BBC4, 12 Oct 2020)  
*EastEnders* (BBC1, 1985- )  
*Edge of Darkness* (BBC2, 1985)  
*Edward II* (BBC2, 6 Aug 1970)  
*Eldorado* (BBC1, 1992-93)  
*Elizabeth R* (BBC2, 1971)  
*Emergency Ward 10* (ATV for ITV, 1957-67)  
*Empire Road* (BBC2, 1978-79)  
*Faith Brown Chat Show, The* (LWT for ITV, 1980)  
*Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin, The* (BBC1, 1976-79)  
*Family, The* (BBC1, 1974)  
*Fawlty Towers* (BBC2, 1975-79)  
*Festival* (BBC Television, 1963-64)  
*Film on Four/FilmFour* (Channel 4, 1982-2004)  
*Food for Ravens* (BBC2, 16 Nov 1997)  
*Forsyte Saga, The* (BBC2, 1967)  
*4 Play* (Channel 4, 1989-91)  
*Gamekeeper, The* (ATV for ITV, only Midlands area, 16 Dec 1980)  
*Gangsters* (BBC1, 1976-78)  
— *Gangsters* commentary, disc 1, 2Entertain DVD, 2006 [CCTV30272].  
*G.B.H.* (GBH Films Ltd. for Channel 4, 1991)  
*General Hospital* (ATV for ITV, 1972-79)  
*Gentle Touch, The* (LWT for ITV, 1980-84)  
*Grand Slam* (BBC1, 1978)  
*Headmaster* (BBC2/BBC1, 1977-78)  
*Heartstopper* (See-Saw Films for Netflix, 2022)  
*I May Destroy You* (BBC1, 2020)  
*In My Skin* (Expectation Entertainment for BBC2/BBC1, 2018-21)  
*In Vision* (BBC2, 1974-75)  
— tx. 1 Nov 1974  
*Inside No. 9* (BBC2, 2014- )  
*Inside Ulster* (BBC1 Northern Ireland, 1984-96)  
— tx. 17 May 1989 [online] **BBC Rewind**, Available at:  
<https://bbcrewind.co.uk/asset/5ea00c5a9cf8e100275679ca?q=%22stewart%20parke%22> [accessed: 27/07/2022]  
*It Ain't Half Hot, Mum* (BBC1, 1974-81)  
*It Was Alright in the...* (All3Media, Objective & Second Star Productions, Channel 4, 2014-16)  
— Series 2 Episode 2, *1980s* (tx. 13 Sep 2015)  
ITV Play of the Week (various companies for ITV, 1956-67)

— *Birthday Party, The* (Associated Rediffusion, tx. 22 Mar 1960)  
 — *You in Your Small Corner* (Granada, tx. 5 Jun 1962)  
 ITV Saturday Night Theatre (various companies for ITV, 1969-71)  
 — *Bangelstein's Boys* (Kestrel for LWT, tx. 18 Jan 1969)  
 — *Roll On Four O'Clock* (Granada, tx. 19 Dec 1970)  
 ITV Television Playhouse (various companies for ITV, 1956-64)  
 — *Collection, The* (tx. 11 May 1961)  
*Jake's Progress* (Diplomat Films for Channel 4, 1995)  
*Jewel in the Crown, The* (Granada for ITV, 1984)  
*Juliet Bravo* (BBC1, 1980-85)  
*Knowledge, The* (Euston Films for Thames/ITV, 27 Dec 1979)  
*Likely Lads, The* (BBC2, 1964-66)  
*Lady's Not For Burning, The* (BBC Television, 12 Mar & 16 Mar 1950)  
*Lorna* (BBC1, 2 June 1987)  
*Love and Marriage* (Yorkshire Television for ITV, 1984-86)  
*Lover, The* (Associated-Rediffusion for ITV, 28 Mar 1963)  
*Magical Mystery Tour* (BBC1, 26 Dec 1967)  
*Man Who Wouldn't Keep Quiet, The* (tx. 24 Nov 1970)  
*Marriage* (All3Media, The Forge & The Money Men for BBC1, 2022- )  
*M\*A\*S\*H\** (20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Television for CBS, 1972-83 [BBC2, 1973-84])  
*Masterpiece Theatre, aka. Masterpiece* (WGBH for PBS, 1971- )  
*Match of the Day* (BBC2, 1964-66, BBC1, 1966-2001, 2004- )  
*Melvyn Bragg on TV: The Box That Changed the World* (tx. BBC2, 1 Jul 2017)  
*Miss World 1970* (BBC1, 20 Nov 1970)  
*Monty Python's Flying Circus* (BBC1/BBC2, 1969-74)  
*Moving On, aka. Jimmy McGovern's Moving On* (LA Productions for BBC1, 2009- )  
*Naked Civil Servant, The* (Thames for ITV, 17 Dec 1975)  
*Occupations* (Granada for ITV, 1 Sep 1974)  
*One Summer* (Yorkshire for Channel 4, 1983)  
*Open Door* (BBC2, 1973-83)  
 — *It Ain't Half Racist, Mum* (CARM for BBC2, 1 Mar 1979)  
*Other Side, The* (BBC2, 1979)  
 — *Only Connect* (tx. 18 May 1979)  
*Our Friends in the North* (BBC2, 1996)  
*Outlaws, The* (Big Talk Productions & Four Eyes Entertainment for BBC1, 2021- )  
*Panorama* (BBC Television/BBC1, 1953- )  
 — *Solzhenitsyn in Exile* (tx. 1 Mar 1976)  
*Pennies from Heaven* (BBC1, 1978)  
*Performance* (BBC2, 1991-98)  
*Philco Television Playhouse, The* (NBC, 1948-55)  
 — *Marty* (Showcase Productions, tx. 24 May 1953)  
 Play for Today (BBC1, 1970-84)  
 — *Abigail's Party* (tx. 1 Nov 1977)  
 — *Access to the Children* (tx. 5 Mar 1973)  
 — *Ackerman, Dougall and Harker* (tx. 10 Feb 1972)  
 — *Adventures of Frank: Part One – Everybody's Fiddling Something, The* (tx. 4 Nov 1980)  
 — *Adventures of Frank: Part Two – Seeds of Ice* (tx. 11 Nov 1980)  
 — *After Dinner Game, The* (tx. 16 Jan 1975)  
 — *After Dinner Joke, The* (tx. 14 Feb 1978)  
 — *Aliens* (tx. 30 Nov 1982)  
 — *All Good Men* (tx. 31 Jan 1974)  
 — *Alma Mater* (tx. 7 Jan 1971)

- *Amazing Miss Stella Estelle* (tx. 28 Aug 1984)
- *Angels Are So Few* (tx. 5 Nov 1970)
- *Atlantis* (tx. 29 Mar 1983)
- *Baby Blues* (tx. 6 Dec 1973)
- *Baby Love* (tx. 7 Nov 1974)
- *Baby Talk* (tx. 21 Apr 1981)
- *Back of Beyond* (tx. 14 Nov 1974)
- *Bankrupt, The* (tx. 27 Nov 1972)
- *Bar Mitzvah Boy* (tx. 14 Sep 1976)
- *Bavarian Night* (tx. 31 Mar 1981)
- *Before Water Lilies* (tx. 24 Mar 1981)
- *Beloved Enemy* (tx. 10 Feb 1981)
- *Bet Your Life* (tx. 21 Sep 1976)
- *Bevellers, The* (tx. 21 Nov 1974)
- *Beyond the Pale* (tx. 6 Jan 1981)
- *Billy* (tx. 15 Nov 1979)
- *Billy's Last Stand* (tx. 4 Feb 1971)
- *Blooming Youth* (tx. 18 Jun 1973)
- *Blue Remembered Hills* (tx. 30 Jan 1979)
- *Bouncing Boy, The* (tx. 11 Dec 1972)
- *Brassneck* (tx. 22 May 1975)
- *Breath* (tx. 23 Jan 1975)
- *Buffet* (tx. 2 Nov 1976)
- *Campion's Interview* (tx. 12 Apr 1977)
- *Carson Country* (tx. 23 Oct 1972)
- *Catchpenny Twist* (tx. 5 Dec 1977)
- *Chance of a Lifetime* (tx. 3 Jan 1980)
- *Charades* (tx. 13 Dec 1977)
- *Cheviot, The Stag and The Black, Black, Oil, The* (tx. 6 Jun 1974)
- *Child of Hope* (tx. 24 Apr 1975)
- *Children of the Sun* (tx. 18 Nov 1975)
- *Choice of Evils, A* (tx. 19 Apr 1977)
- *Circle Line* (tx. 14 Jan 1971)
- *Clay, Smeddum and Greenden* (tx. 24 Feb 1976)
- *Come the Revolution* (tx. 25 Oct 1977)
- *Comedians* (tx. 25 Oct 1979)
- *Coming Out* (tx. 10 Apr 1979)
- *Coming to Terms for Billy, A* (tx. 21 Feb 1984)
- *Commitments* (tx. 26 Jan 1982)
- *Cotswold Death, A* (tx. 12 Jan 1982)
- *Country* (tx. 20 Oct 1981)
- *Country Party, The* (tx. 26 Apr 1977)
- *Cries from a Watchtower* (tx. 18 Oct 1979)
- *Cry, The* (tx. 31 Jul 1984)
- *Dandelion Clock, The* (tx. 15 May 1975)
- *Death of a Young, Young Man* (tx. 30 Jan 1975)
- *Degree of Uncertainty* (tx. 6 Mar 1979)
- *Desert of Lies* (tx. 13 Mar 1984)
- *Destiny* (tx. 31 Jan 1978)
- *Dinner at the Sporting Club* (tx. 7 Nov 1978)
- *Distant Thunder, A* (tx. 26 Nov 1970)
- *Do As I Say* (tx. 25 Jan 1977)
- *Dog Ends* (tx. 17 Jul 1984)

- *Donal and Sally* (tx. 14 Nov 1978)
- *Don't Be Silly* (tx. 24 Jul 1979)
- *Double Dare* (tx. 6 Apr 1976)
- *Doran's Box* (tx. 20 Jan 1976)
- *Dreams of Leaving* (tx. 17 Jan 1980)
- *Early Struggles* (tx. 30 Mar 1976)
- *Edna, The Inebriate Woman* (tx. 21 Oct 1971)
- *Edward G.: Like the Film Star* (tx. 11 Jun 1973)
- *Eleanor* (tx. 12 Dec 1974)
- *Elephants' Graveyard, The* (tx. 12 Oct 1976)
- *England's Greens and Peasant Land* (tx. 5 Jan 1982)
- *Eve Set the Balls of Corruption Rolling* (tx. 30 Mar 1982)
- *Even Solomon* (tx. 1 Nov 1979)
- *Everybody Say Cheese* (tx. 3 Jun 1971)
- *Executioner, The* (tx. 17 Apr 1980)
- *Falklands Factor, The* (tx. 26 Apr 1983)
- *Fishing Party, The* (tx. 1 Jun 1972)
- *Flipside of Dominick Hide, The* (tx. 9 Dec 1980)
- *For Sylvia, or The Air Show* (tx. 19 Feb 1973)
- *Foxtrot, The* (tx. 29 Apr 1971)
- *Funny Farm* (tx. 27 Feb 1975)
- *Gangsters* (tx. 10 Jan 1975)
- *Garland (Shai Mala Khani), The* (tx. 10 Mar 1981)
- *Gates of Gold* (tx. 8 Mar 1983)
- *Gift from Nessus, A* (tx. 28 Feb 1980)
- *Good Time Girls, The* (tx. 7 Apr 1981)
- *Gotcha* (tx. 12 Apr 1977)
- *Groundling and the Kite, The* (tx. 24 Jul 1984)
- *Hallelujah Handshake, The* (tx. 17 Dec 1970)
- *Happy Hunting Ground, The* (tx. 10 Feb 1976)
- *Hard Feelings* (tx. 20 Mar 1984)
- *Hard Labour* (tx. 12 Mar 1973)
- *Hearts and Flowers* (tx. 3 Dec 1970)
- *Hell's Angel* (tx. 21 Jan 1971)
- *Her Majesty's Pleasure* (tx. 25 Oct 1973)
- *Hole in Babylon, A* (tx. 29 Nov 1979)
- *Home Sweet Home* (tx. 16 Mar 1982)
- *Housewives' Choice* (tx. 19 Oct 1976)
- *I Can't See My Little Willie* (tx. 19 Nov 1970)
- *Imitation Game, The* (tx. 24 Apr 1980)
- *In the Beautiful Caribbean* (tx. 3 Feb 1972)
- *Intensive Care* (tx. 9 Nov 1982)
- *Iris in the Traffic, Ruby in the Rain* (tx. 24 Nov 1981)
- *It Could Happen to Anybody* (tx. 14 Aug 1984)
- *Jack Point* (tx. 1 Nov 1973)
- *Jessie* (tx. 23 Dec 1980)
- *Jingle Bells* (tx. 13 Dec 1973)
- *Joe's Ark* (tx. 14 Feb 1974)
- *John David* (tx. 23 Nov 1982)
- *Jude* (tx. 2 Dec 1980)
- *Jumping Bean Bag* (tx. 17 Feb 1976)
- *Just A Boys' Game* (tx. 8 Nov 1979)
- *Just Another Saturday* (tx. 13 Mar 1975)

- *Just Your Luck* (tx. 4 Dec 1972)
- *Kamikaze Ground Staff Reunion Dinner, The* (tx. 17 Feb 1981)
- *Kate The Good Neighbour* (tx. 6 Mar 1980)
- *Keep an Eye on Albert* (tx. 11 Nov 1975)
- *Keep Smiling* (tx. 10 Jan 1980)
- *King* (tx. 3 Apr 1984)
- *Kiss of Death, The* (tx. 11 Jan 1977)
- *Kisses at Fifty* (tx. 22 Jan 1973)
- *Ladies* (tx. 27 Mar 1980)
- *Land of Green Ginger* (tx. 15 Jan 1973)
- *Largest Theatre in the World: The Lie, The* (tx. 29 Oct 1970)
- *Largest Theatre in the World: The Rainbirds, The* (tx. 11 Feb 1971)
- *Last Love* (tx. 1 Mar 1983)
- *Last Window Cleaner, The* (tx. 13 Feb 1979)
- *Leeds United!* (tx. 31 Oct 1974)
- *Legion Hall Bombing, The* (tx. 22 Aug 1978)
- *Licking Hitler* (tx. 10 Jan 1978)
- *Life is For Ever, A* (tx. 16 Oct 1972)
- *Light* (tx. 13 Mar 1979)
- *Lonely Man's Lover, The* (tx. 17 Jan 1974)
- *Long Distance Information* (tx. 11 Oct 1979)
- *Long Distance Piano Player, The* (tx. 15 Oct 1970)
- *Love on a Gunboat* (tx. 4 Jan 1977)
- *Making the Play* (tx. 2 Jul 1973)
- *Man in the Sidecar, The* (tx. 27 May 1971)
- *Matter of Choice for Billy, A* (tx. 10 May 1983)
- *Mayor's Charity, The* (tx. 29 Nov 1977)
- *Michael Regan* (tx. 18 Nov 1971)
- *Minor Complications* (tx. 18 Nov 1980)
- *Moss* (tx. 28 Oct 1975)
- *Mother Like Him, A* (tx. 16 Nov 1982)
- *Moving on the Edge* (tx. 6 Mar 1984)
- *Murder Rap* (tx. 31 Jan 1980)
- *Muscle Market, The* (tx. 13 Jan 1981)
- *Name for the Day* (tx. 16 Dec 1980)
- *Network, The* (tx. 20 Dec 1979)
- *Nina* (tx. 17 Oct 1978)
- *No Visible Scar* (tx. 17 Nov 1981)
- *Not for the Likes of Us* (tx. 10 Apr 1980)
- *Nuts in May* (tx. 13 Jan 1976)
- *O Fat White Woman* (tx. 4 Nov 1971)
- *Only Children* (tx. 21 Aug 1984)
- *Only Make Believe* (tx. 12 Feb 1973)
- *Operation, The* (tx. 26 Feb 1973)
- *Orkney* (tx. 13 May 1971)
- *Other Woman, The* (tx. 6 Jan 1976)
- *Our Flesh and Blood* (tx. 18 Jan 1977)
- *Oy Vay Maria* (tx. 8 Nov 1977)
- *Packman's Barn* (tx. 27 Jan 1976)
- *Pal* (tx. 2 Dec 1971)
- *Pasmore* (tx. 21 Oct 1980)
- *Passage to England, A* (tx. 9 Dec 1975)
- *Penda's Fen* (tx. 21 Mar 1974)

- *Photograph, A* (tx. 22 Mar 1977)
- *Piano, The* (tx. 28 Jan 1971)
- *Pigeon Fancier, The* (tx. 9 Dec 1971)
- *Plaintiffs and Defendants* (tx. 14 Oct 1975)
- *Ploughman's Share* (tx. 27 Feb 1979)
- *Psy-Warriors* (tx. 12 May 1981)
- *Rainy Day Women* (tx. 10 Apr 1984)
- *Rank and File, The* (tx. 20 May 1971)
- *Red Shift* (tx. 17 Jan 1978)
- *Reluctant Chickens* (tx. 12 Apr 1983)
- *Remainder Man, The* (tx. 2 Nov 1982)
- *Reporters, The* (tx. 9 Oct 1972)
- *Right Prospectus, The* (tx. 22 Oct 1970)
- *Robin Redbreast* (tx. 10 Dec 1970)
- *Rocky Marciano is Dead* (tx. 28 Sep 1976)
- *Room for the Winter, A* (tx. 3 Nov 1981)
- *Rumpole of the Bailey* (tx. 16 Dec 1975)
- *Saturday Party, The* (tx. 1 May 1975)
- *Schmoedipus* (tx. 20 Jun 1974)
- *Scully's New Year's Eve* (tx. 3 Jan 1978)
- *Shadows on our Skin* (tx. 20 Mar 1980)
- *Shakespeare or Bust!* (tx. 8 Jan 1973)
- *Shall I Be Mother?* (tx. 19 Apr 1983)
- *Shutdown* (tx. 29 Nov 1973)
- *Silly Season, The* (tx. 9 Feb 1982)
- *Sin Bin, The* (tx. 17 Mar 1981)
- *Slab Boys, The* (tx. 6 Dec 1979)
- *Sorry* (tx. 3 Mar 1981)
- *Speech Day* (tx. 26 Mar 1973)
- *Spend, Spend, Spend* (tx. 15 Mar 1977)
- *Spongers, The* (tx. 24 Jan 1978)
- *Steps Back* (tx. 14 May 1973)
- *Still Waters* (tx. 13 Jan 1972)
- *Stocker's Copper* (tx. 20 Jan 1972)
- *Story to Frighten the Children* (tx. 3 Feb 1976)
- *Stretch, The* (tx. 25 Jun 1973)
- *Sudden Wrench, A* (tx. 23 Mar 1982)
- *Sunset Across the Bay* (tx. 20 Feb 1975)
- *Taking Leave* (tx. 28 Nov 1974)
- *Thicker than Water* (tx. 24 Jan 1980)
- *Thin End of the Wedge, The* (tx. 20 Dec 1977)
- *Three for the Fancy* (tx. 11 Apr 1974)
- *3 Minute Heroes* (tx. 26 Oct 1982)
- *Three's One* (tx. 4 Jun 1973)
- *Through the Night* (tx. 2 Dec 1975)
- *Tiptoe Through the Tulips* (tx. 16 Mar 1976)
- *Too Late to Talk to Billy* (tx. 16 Feb 1982)
- *Touch of the Tiny Hacketts, A* (tx. 31 Oct 1978)
- *Traitor* (tx. 14 Oct 1971)
- *Two Sundays* (tx. 21 Oct 1975)
- *Under the Hammer* (tx. 27 Mar 1984)
- *Under the Skin* (tx. 19 Jan 1982)
- *Union, The* (tx. 24 Feb 1981)

- *United Kingdom* (tx. 8 Dec 1981)
- *Vampires* (tx. 9 Jan 1979)
- *Victims of Apartheid* (tx. 24 Oct 1978)
- *Walk in the Forest, A* (tx. 14 May 1980)
- *Waterloo Sunset* (tx. 23 Jan 1979)
- *Wednesday Love* (tx. 8 May 1975)
- *When the Bough Breaks* (tx. 6 May 1971)
- *Willie Rough* (tx. 9 Mar 1976)
- *Willie's Last Stand* (tx. 23 Feb 1982)
- *Young Shoulders* (tx. 14 Feb 1984)
- *Your Man from Six Counties* (tx. 26 Oct 1976)
- *Z for Zachariah* (tx. 28 Feb 1984)
- Play for Today – unofficial (BBC1 unless otherwise stated, 1970-85)
  - *Being Normal* (tx. 27 Jul 1983)
  - *Brimstone and Treacle* (1976; tx. BBC2, 25 Aug 1987)
  - *Englishman Abroad, An* (tx. 29 Nov 1983)
  - *Four Days in July* (tx. 29 Jan 1985)
  - *Gunfight at the Joe Kaye Corral* (tx. 3 Aug 1983)
  - *Home* (tx. 6 Jan 1972)
  - *Mimosa Boys, The* (tx. 19 Jun 1985)
  - *Price of Coal: Part One – Meet the People, The* (tx. 29 Mar 1977)
  - *Price of Coal: Part Two – Back to Reality, The* (tx. 5 Apr 1977)
  - *Scum* (1977; tx. Channel 4, 27 Jul 1991)
  - *Stan's Last Game* (tx. 25 Oct 1983)
- Play for Tomorrow (BBC1, 1982)
  - *Cricket* (tx. 27 Apr 1982)
  - *Crimes* (tx. 13 Apr 1982)
  - *Nuclear Family, The* (tx. 4 May 1982)
- Play of the Month (BBC1, 1965-83)
  - *Loyalties* (tx. 29 Feb 1976)
  - *Strife* (tx. 18 May 1975)
- Play on One, The (BBC1, 1988-91)
  - *Airbase* (tx. 1 Mar 1988)
- Plays for Britain (Thames for ITV, 1976)
  - Police* (BBC1, 1982)
  - Porridge* (BBC1, 1974-77)
- Preview (Scottish Television for ITV, 1980-84)
- Rainbow City* (BBC1, 1967)
- random* (Hillbilly Films for Channel 4, 23 Aug 2011)
- Roadkill* (The Forge for BBC1, 2020)
- Roads to Freedom, The* (BBC2, 1970)
- Rock Follies/Rock Follies of '77* (Thames for ITV, 1976-77)
- Rumpole of the Bailey* (Thames for ITV, 1978-91)
- Scene (BBC1/BBC2, 1968-2007)
  - *Two Of Us* (tx. 25 Mar 1988)
- Scene Around Six (BBC1 Northern Ireland, 1969-84)
  - tx. 12 Aug 1976 [online] **BBC Rewind**, Available at: <https://bbcrewind.co.uk/asset/5c0ffcccec87482002130f21c?q=%22colin%20welland%22> [accessed: 27/07/2022]
  - tx. 2 Dec 1983 [online] **BBC Rewind**, Available at: <https://bbcrewind.co.uk/asset/5df8f58527d61300272abe1f?q=%22PLAY%20FOR%20TODAY%22> [accessed: 27/07/2022]
- Screen One (BBC1, 1989-98)

— *Ghostwatch* (tx. 31 Oct 1992)  
 Screen Two (BBC2, 1985-98)  
 — *Burston Rebellion, The* (tx. 24 Feb 1985)  
 — *Lent* (tx. 10 Feb 1985)  
 — *Silent Twins, The* (tx. 19 Jan 1986)  
 ScreenPlay (BBC2, 1986-93)  
 — *Road* (tx. 7 Oct 1987)  
*Scully* (Granada for Channel 4, 1984)  
 Second City Firsts (BBC2, 1973-78)  
 — *Club Havana* (tx. 25 Oct 1975)  
*Send in the Girls* (Granada for ITV, 1978)  
 — *Hardy Breed of Girl, A* (tx. 15 Mar 1978)  
*Seven Up* (Granada for ITV/BBC1, 1964-2019)  
 — *21 Up* (tx. 9 May 1977)  
*Shadows of Fear* (Thames for ITV, 1970-73)  
*Sharing Time* (BBC2, 1984)  
*Sherwood* (House Productions for BBC1, 2022)  
*Shoulder to Shoulder* (BBC2, 1974)  
*Silent Witness* (BBC1, 1996- )  
*Singing Detective, The* (BBC1, 1986)  
*Six Wives of Henry VIII, The* (BBC2, 1970)  
*Small Axe* (BBC1, 2020)  
*Softly, Softly* (BBC1, 1966-69)  
*Sopranos, The* (Brillstein Entertainment Partners & HBO, 1999-2007 [Channel 4])  
*South Bank Show, The* (LWT for ITV, 1978-2010; Sky Arts, 2012- )  
 — *Paul Morrissey/David Hare* (tx. 10 Apr 1978)  
 — *The Rise and Fall of the Single-play* (tx. 8 Apr 1979)  
*Steptoe and Son* (BBC Television/BBC1, 1962-74)  
*Strange Days: Cold War Britain* (BBC2, 2013)  
 — Episode 2: *The Looking Glass War* (tx. BBC2, 19 Nov 2013)  
*Summer of Rockets* (Little Island Productions for BBC2, 2019)  
*Sweeney, The* (Euston Films/Thames for ITV, 1975-78)  
*Take the High Road* (Scottish Television for ITV, 1980-2003)  
*Tales of the Unexpected* (Anglia Television for ITV, 1979-88)  
*Tales out of School* (Central for ITV, 1983)  
 — *Made in Britain* (tx. 10 Jul 1983)  
*Talking Heads* (BBC1/BBC2, 1988-2020)  
 — *Bed Among the Lentils* (tx. 3 May 1988)  
*Talking to a Stranger* (BBC2, 1966) [originally under Theatre 625 strand]  
*Tandoori Nights* (Picture Palace and Angel Films for Channel 4, 1985-87)  
*Tenko* (BBC1, 1981-82, 1984-85)  
*Threads* (BBC2, 23 Sep 1984)  
*Theatre Night* (BBC2, 1985-90)  
*Thriller* (ATV for ITV, 1973-76)  
*Till Death Us Do Part* (BBC1, 1965-75)  
*Time Shift* (BBC4, 2002-10)  
 — *Left of Frame: The Rise and Fall of Radical TV Drama* (tx. 7 Feb 2006)  
 — *Stephen Poliakoff – a Brief History of Now* (tx. 15 Jan 2006)  
*Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (BBC2, 1979)  
*Today* (Thames for ITV, 1968-77)  
*Tonight* (BBC1, 1975-79)  
 — (tx. 2 Dec 1975)  
 — (tx. 10 Apr 1979)

*Top of the Pops* (BBC1, 1964-2021)  
*Touch of Eastern Promise, A* (BBC2, 8 Feb 1973)  
*Traffik* (Carnival Film & Television & Picture Partnership for Channel 4, 1989)  
*Trinity Tales* (BBC2, 1975)  
*Tumbledown* (BBC1, 31 May 1988)  
*Twin Peaks* (Lynch/Frost Productions, Spelling Entertainment, Twin Peaks Productions, Propaganda Films, Rancho Rosa Partnership for ABC & Showtime, 1990-2017) [BBC2, 1990-91; Now TV, 2017])  
*Two Ronnies, The* (BBC1, 1971-87)  
*Upstairs, Downstairs* (LWT for ITV, 1971-75)  
*Very British Coup, A* (Channel 4, 1988)  
*Waltons, The* (Lorimar Productions for CBS, 1972-81 [BBC2, 1974-83])  
*War Game, The* (1965; tx. BBC2, 31 Jul 1985)  
*Ways of Seeing* (BBC2, 1972)  
     — Episode 4 (tx. 29 Jan 1972)  
 Wednesday Play, The (BBC1, 1964-70)  
     — *And Did Those Feet?* (tx. 2 Jun 1965)  
     — *Apprentices, The* (tx. 29 Jan 1969)  
     — *Big Breaker, The* (tx. 18 Nov 1964)  
     — *Bit of Crucifixion, Father, A* (tx. 30 Oct 1968)  
     — *Black Candle for Mrs Gogarty, A* (tx. 25 Oct 1967)  
     — *Cathy Come Home* (tx. 16 Nov 1966)  
     — *Cemented with Love* (tx. 5 May 1965)  
     — *Close the Coalhouse Door* (tx. 22 Oct 1969)  
     — *Cock, Hen and Courting Pit* (tx. 22 Jun 1966)  
     — *Drums Along the Avon* (tx. 24 May 1967)  
     — *Fable* (tx. 27 Jan 1965)  
     — *For the West* (tx. 26 May 1965)  
     — *Horror of Darkness* (tx. 10 Mar 1965)  
     — *In Two Minds* (tx. 1 Mar 1967)  
     — *July Plot, The* (tx. 9 Dec 1964)  
     — *Last Train Through Harecastle Tunnel, The* (tx. 1 Oct 1969)  
     — *Let's Murder Vivaldi* (tx. 10 Apr 1968)  
     — *Little Master Mind, The* (tx. 14 Dec 1966)  
     — *Lump, The* (tx. 1 Feb 1967)  
     — *Mr Douglas* (tx. 25 Nov 1964)  
     — *Night with Mrs Da Tanka, A* (tx. 11 Sep 1968)  
     — *Officer of the Court, An* (tx. 20 Dec 1967)  
     — *Patterson O.K.* (tx. 8 Oct 1969)  
     — *Portsmouth Defence, The* (tx. 30 Mar 1966)  
     — *Sling Your Hook* (tx. 2 Apr 1969)  
     — *Sovereign's Company* (tx. 22 Apr 1970)  
     — *Stand Up for Nigel Barton* (tx. 8 Dec 1965)  
     — *Tap on the Shoulder, A* (tx. 6 Jan 1965)  
     — *Up the Junction* (tx. 3 Nov 1965)  
     — *Vote, Vote, Vote for Nigel Barton* (tx. 15 Dec 1965)  
 Wednesday Thriller, The (BBC1, 1965)  
*Wheeltappers and Shunters Social Club, The* (Granada for ITV, 1974-77)  
*When the Boat Comes In* (BBC1, 1976-81)  
*Widows* (Euston Films for Thames/ITV, 1983-85)  
*Wire, The* (Blown Deadline Productions & HBO, 2002-08 [BBC2, 2009])  
 Women (Granada for ITV, 1983)  
     — *Hard to Get* (tx. 19 Jul 1983)

*Word of Mouth* (BBC2, 1976)

— *The Big Yin and the Wee Yin* (tx. 5 Aug 1976)

*World in Action* (Granada for ITV, 1963-98)

*World on a Wire* [*Welt am Draht*] (Westdeutscher Rundfunk for ARD, 1973)

*Yorkshire Ripper Files: A Very British Crime Story, The* (Wall to Wall Media for BBC, 2019)

*Z Cars* (BBC Television/BBC1, 1962-78)