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Citation: Das Neves, Sheron Helena Martins (2013) 'Running a brothel from inside a monastery': drama co-productions at the BBC and the trade relationship with America from the 1970s to the 1990s. MPhil thesis, Birkbeck, University of London.

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BIRKBECK, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
SCHOOL OF ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY OF ART AND SCREEN MEDIA
MPhil VISUAL ARTS AND MEDIA

***'RUNNING A BROTHEL FROM INSIDE A MONASTERY':
DRAMA CO-PRODUCTIONS AT THE BBC AND THE TRADE RELATIONSHIP
WITH AMERICA FROM THE 1970s TO THE 1990s***

SHERON HELENA MARTINS DAS NEVES

I hereby declare that this is my own original work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Sheron H.M. das Neves'.

August 2013

ABSTRACT

From the late 1970s on, as competition intensified, British broadcasters searched for new ways to cover the escalating budgets for top-end drama. A common industry practice, overseas co-productions seems the fitting answer for most broadcasters; for the BBC, however, creating programmes that appeal to both national and international markets could mean being in conflict with its public service ethos. Paradoxes will always be at the heart of an institution that, while pressured to be profitable, also carries a deep-rooted disapproval of commercialism. A situation rather well illustrated by the analogy of a monastery trying to run a brothel, voiced by Rupert Gavin when appointed Head of BBC Worldwide.

While the selling of finished programmes and formats has been more visible in public discourse as well as in academic research, the issue of transnational drama co-productions (especially those backed by American parties) and their impact on the BBC has lacked the appropriate scholarly attention it deserves. Similarly, although the history of the BBC and its organisational culture has received substantial attention, the extent to which drama co-productions have facilitated programming since the 1970s and the resulting internal conflicts they generated at the BBC have not been examined in depth in existing literature.

This thesis is concerned with the BBC's journey as an international co-producer across three decades, and the process through which it has evolved from a hesitant to a proficient partner for American organisations – despite downplaying this the eyes of the British public. In order to demonstrate the anxieties prompted by its relationship with PBS and Time-Life during the 1970s and 1980s, the case of *Masterpiece Theatre* (the strand of British drama sponsored by Mobil Oil) is examined; meanwhile, the case of *Pride And Prejudice* (the classic serial co-produced with A&E) is used to illustrate the period between the late 1980s and the 1990s, when the growth of cable services in America provided a new outlet for British television fare – as well as a new type of partner.

Drawing on primary sources such as interviews with key British broadcasting executives and documents from the BBC Written Archives, as well as secondary sources such as media texts and up-to-date literature, this thesis offers a unique contribution to the field of broadcasting history and transnational television culture, adding original and relevant insights into the existing scholarly debate.

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1. INTRODUCTION

‘We produce for our own public – which pays. (...) No amount of success in the USA can compensate for loss of British support – or infringement of our Charter or betrayal of our own standards.’¹

Concerns around Americanisation of British broadcasting have existed since the very early days of radio; by the mid-1950s, as the BBC and ITV began competing for viewers, television also became a major focus of concern – especially once the practice of importing US shows, once restricted to the commercial companies, started to be followed by the BBC. The general criticism expressed by policy makers and media commentators at the time was that such programmes threatened to impose American values upon British audiences.² A few decades later, once again criticisms around Americanisation of British television would emerge; not so much over the importing of TV programmes, but this time over a supposed reliance on American funding to produce first-rate British programming, as well as the danger of imposing commercial pressures on a public broadcaster such as the BBC.³

Nevertheless, as production costs started to rise and competition intensified, co-producing with American counterparts seemed to British broadcasters, especially to the non-advertising funded BBC, the fitting answer to the growing market pressures. It could be argued, in fact, that international co-production and co-financing have gradually become the rule rather than the exception, especially when it comes to high-budget drama. As broadcasters have progressively searched for external funds, an unprecedented increase in the volume of co-produced programmes has appeared on British small screens: the scheduled hours of co-production doubled between 1996/7 and 2003 – from over 3,000 hours in 1996/7 to over 6,000 hours five years later.⁴ Joint projects with America in 2003 have accounted for 93 per cent of total UK co-production revenue,⁵ a 22 per cent increase on 2002; and the numbers

¹ Robin Scott, ‘Time-Life And The BBC’, paper, 27 March 1974, p. 5.

² See Mackie (July-September 1954), Lealand (1984), Crisell (1997), Ellis (2000), Hilmes (2003) and Rixon (2003).

³ See Smith (1972), Winston (1983), Strover (1995) and Giddings and Selby (2001).

⁴ *Rights Of Passage: British Television In The Global Market* (London: UK Trade & Investment, 2005), pp. 4-5.

⁵ *Ibid.*

continued climbing during that decade, as in 2007 US co-production funding for drama doubled in comparison to the previous year.⁶

The BBC has been involved in international joint-projects since the late 1960s, mainly with countries such as the United States, Canada and Australia, with which Britain shares commonalities like language, culture and history. Such co-productions have not been limited to drama genre; they range from documentaries to children's programming and travelogue. Although a rather common industry practice and a natural response to the market pressures, when a public organisation such as the BBC - often regarded as one of the greatest cultural institution in the world⁷ – increasingly co-produces with American money, it will most likely raise eyebrows. Overseas funding – as well as any hint of a more commercial course – can be regarded not only as a threat to the integrity of national television but also as being in conflict with the Corporation's own public service ethos. A challenge accurately summarized by Rupert Gavin after being appointed Head of BBC Worldwide as similar to 'running a brothel from inside a monastery.'⁸

This thesis is concerned with the BBC's journey as a co-producer across three decades, and the process through which it has evolved from a guarded and inexperienced partner to one of the top producers of co-funded material in the world. The reasons that propelled the Corporation to seek funding outside the licence fee will be examined in detail, as well as the ramifications of such enterprises through an historical, institutional and production framework. By concentrating on the relationship between the BBC and its American partners (more specifically Time-Life Films, PBS, WGBH and A&E), from an experimental start in the 1970s to a virtual co-dependency from the 1990s onwards, this thesis will investigate the cultural and organisational conflicts prompted by such relationships.

Even though theories of American cultural imperialism and the many concerns surrounding it will be contemplated, it is important to stress the fact that this study does not intend to advocate in favour or against those, nor will it attempt to detect evidence of American influence on British television fare, be it co-produced or not. It is nevertheless interested in how worries over American influence have inexorably permeated and/or contaminated the cultural and commercial exchanges between the BBC and the US

⁶ BBC Worldwide Annual Review 2006/2007, *BBC Worldwide Website*, <http://www.bbcworldwide.com/annualreviews/review2007/default.htm>.

⁷ John Birt, MacTaggart Lecture, Edinburgh Television Festival, 26 August 2005.

⁸ Rupert Gavin, 2002, quoted in James Hardin, 'Moving Four Forward: Banking On 4 Ventures', *Financial Times*, Creative Business section, 28 January 2002, <http://specials.ft.com/creativebusiness/jan292002/FT3NRCYA0XC.html>.

broadcasters, beginning with the importation of programmes in the early days of television and culminating with the growth of co-production deals. Such concerns seem to be equally driven by external forces – critics, industry commentators, media scholars, public service advocates – as well as by internal ones, that is, the BBC’s strong organisational inner-culture, one that seems to dread the idea of being accused of commercialism even more than the idea of commercialism itself. Thus, while presenting the history of those transcultural relationships against a changing economic and political backdrop, this thesis will also illustrate the BBC’s relationship with its own notion of public service provision.

The proposed topic has not yet been given the adequate scholarly attention that it rightly deserves. Even though the history of British television has been covered by a large number of scholars, from Andrew Crisell (1997, 2006) and Michele Hilmes (2003, 2012) to Lez Cooke (2003), Robin Nelson (1986, 1997) and John Ellis (2000), the foundations as well as the ramifications of the BBC’s increasing dependence on co-production deals with America are still not accurately dealt with in the existing scholarly research. Meticulously covered by Asa Briggs (1985, 1995) and Tom Burns (1977), the official history of the BBC can also be found in personal accounts such as the autobiographies of Director General Ian Trethowan (1984) and Head of Drama Shaun Sutton (1982). Additionally, there are two studies that focus largely on the Corporation’s inner culture and organisational aspects: *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke And The Reinvention Of The BBC*, by anthropologist Georgina Born (2004), and *Inside The BBC And CNN: Managing Media Organisations* (2000), based on Lucy Küng-Shankleman’s doctoral thesis at the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland. Born spent the mid-1990s and the early 2000s inside the BBC observing its inner workings and the effects of the commercial management techniques implemented. Although she does present some very useful insights taken from BBC staff meetings regarding co-production deals, the subject is not the main focus of her study and thus its coverage does not exceed a few pages. Küng-Shankleman's research concentrates on the cultural beliefs of two major media organisations, CNN and BCC, and on how those affect strategic decisions. Underpinned by Edgar H. Schein's pioneering theories on organisation culture, Küng-Shankleman's research brings interesting insights regarding the BBC’s adaptation process to the new competitive environment; yet, no mention of co-production deals is made.⁹

Sharon Stover (1995, 2004) is amongst the few scholars who have appropriately explored the topic of television international co-productions, looking into the possible effects of such

⁹ The author briefly mentions ‘commercial alliances’ but is never clear about the nature or form of such ventures.

ventures on national culture. Nevertheless, her article *Recent Trends In Coproductions: The Demise Of The National*, looks mainly into the relationship between the US and Europe and thus fails to explore the specific case of the United Kingdom and the BBC. Barbara Selznick (2008) is another author who examines the subject; her book *Global Television: Co-Producing Culture*, which concentrates on the culture of co-productions in a globalised television market, is very comprehensive and one of the most recent ones available. Despite presenting a rather informative chapter on *Pride And Prejudice* and its role in building a British brand image overseas, her analysis neglects not only to take into account the relational aspects between the BBC and its US partners but also to include testimonials of, or interviews with, producers and broadcasters.

Canadian media economists Colin Hoskins, Adam Finn and Stuart McFayden (1998, 2000) are well known for their several works on the cultural differences of internationally co-produced feature films and television shows, as well as their theories on the reasons for US domination of international television trade. Although those authors investigate the business aspects of television international co-productions, they do not concentrate on the United Kingdom market or on the specific relationship between the BBC and the US companies. Other authors that should be mentioned are Richard Collins, Nicholas Garnham and Gareth Locksley (Collins *et al.*, 1988), who have, during the 1980s, carried out an analysis of the economics of UK television, dedicating a couple of pages to the topic of international co-production. Jeanette Steemers (2004), as well as Tom O'Regan (2001), have written on the international circulation of British television and the new economics of the international television trade; Steemers' well-executed study explores even further the trading of programmes between the UK and the US and the complexity of both markets, dedicating nevertheless a small number of pages to the specific topic of BBC's international co-productions.

Exploring the US-UK television exchange are also the works of Paul Rixon (2003, 2006) and Kerry Segrave (1998); the former focuses on the way American programmes have been assimilated into the British television schedules, the latter documents the US television industry's efforts, not always successful, to dominate foreign markets. In addition, Robert Giddings and Keith Selby (2001) have produced a rather unique historical survey of the classic serial genre, highlighting the fact that a huge percentage of these serials are co-produced with America. Their work offers some very useful insights on the historical and economic context that brought about an overemphasis on this very British television genre.

Recently, two enriching contributions to this discussion have been supplied by Michele Hilmes (2012) and Simone Knox (2012), who examine the transnational media history between the UK and the US. Although both works have been published rather near the completion of this thesis, they were able to provide additional US archival material (such as the Library of American Broadcasting and the National Public Broadcasting Library, in Knox's case) and some useful insights into the forms of transnationalism (in Hilmes' case, as she draws upon Mette Hjort's 2010 article about the subject).

With reference to the history of American television, works by Erik Barnouw (1982), Jamie Medhurst (2003, 2006) and Amanda Lotz (2007) were particularly valuable in providing a background context. The concepts of TV I, TV II and TV III by Michael Epstein, Jimmie Reeves and Mark Rogers (2002) are also crucial to building some of my key arguments. Moreover, the 1970s and 1980s period in American public broadcasting is well illustrated by two authors: David Stewart (1999) and Laurence Jarvik (1999). In his nearly autobiographic report of the history of public television in America, former Corporation for Public Broadcasting executive David Stewart dedicates a whole chapter of his book to the creation of the *Masterpiece Theatre* anthology series. Laurence Jarvik has produced a description of the American politics behind the creation of the series. None of the accounts, however, truly delves into the relationship between the involved partners at the time (BBC, PBS, Time-Life and Mobil), and more importantly, the internal repercussions of these new funding practices at the BBC. Jarvik does provide elucidatory interviews with key people, failing nevertheless to explore the rather rich supply of archival material available at the BBC Written Archives that would have proved so beneficial and immensely illustrative for his work.

Yet none of the aforementioned accounts has focused particularly on the history of BBC's co-productions with the US, on the way such activities have been regarded both outside and inside the Corporation, or on the internal adjustments that had to be done along the way by all the institutions involved. Thus, the significance of co-productions has been overlooked by most historical accounts of both British broadcasting and the BBC, a gap that has also been highlighted by Hilmes.¹⁰

Finally, it is important to address the writer's own frame of reference as a researcher. Having been brought up in Brazil, her viewpoint is of an 'outsider', a fact which allows for a

¹⁰ Michele Hilmes, *Network Nations: A Transnational History Of British And American Broadcasting* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 258.

more unattached and impartial vision, one which is not always easily achieved by indigenous researchers - especially when it concerns a major national institution such as the BBC. Along with a ten-year professional experience in the fields of marketing and branding and a MA degree in History of Film and Visual Media (Birkbeck, 2005), this researcher is in an especially good position to carry out the proposed subject of study.

1.1. The methodology

By examining the economic and cultural context that instigated the BBC's long-lasting partnership with American public service broadcaster WGBH and with cable channel Arts & Entertainment Network, this thesis will build an historical foundation that will lead up to two case studies: the anthology series *Masterpiece Theatre* and the serial *Pride And Prejudice*. This study is concerned with the co-producing process of mainly two drama formats: serials (in which episodes are sequentially linked, commonly referred to as 'miniseries' in the US) and series (collection of discrete self-contained episodes that focus on a single character, theme or situation and may be screened and viewed in no particular order).¹¹ A few references to single dramas will also be made, mostly when writing about the late 1960s and the early 1970s, as these single productions began to give way to serialised formats on British screens.¹²

The BBC Written Archives Centre, which holds historical documents such as contracts, reports, minutes, letters, memos, in-house publications and promotional materials in its Reading facilities, is one of the primary research sources for this thesis; one, however, that is limited to the year 1979, the extent to which the BBC has archived internal written documentation. Other archival research sources include the BFI National Archive in London and The Paley Center for Media in New York City. Individual in-depth interviews with a number of BBC executives involved in the production and/or negotiations with American broadcasters/distributors have also provided some interesting details based on their own experience.¹³ This study also draws on autobiographies, audience research, industry reports, reviews and articles in both general and trade press, as well as important secondary sources in

¹¹ Andrew Crisell, *A Study Of Modern Television: Thinking Inside The Box* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 115-6.

¹² Crisell, 2006, p. 115.

¹³ It is important to take into account, however, that this type of account can at times rely too much on memory and therefore not be absolutely accurate (especially regarding events occurred more than twenty years ago).

media and cultural studies and American television history texts (all listed earlier in the Introduction).

1.2. The structure

This thesis is organised into five chapters. **Chapter one** will begin with a discussion of the matter of television and national identity, as well as Britain's cultural trade with America. It will also look at the so-called 'invasion' of American television imports in the mid-1950s and 1960s and the intensely critical view of commercial television in Britain, setting the foundation for a discussion of the BBC's over-reliance on American co-production funding, which will be presented in the following chapters.

Chapter two will look into the definition of the term 'international television co-production', the different types of partnership and the benefits and drawbacks involved in such enterprises, which started to become growingly indispensable for the survival of first-rate programming at the Corporation. Drawing on written documents, memos, letters and statements by BBC executives, it also attempts to establish the meaning of the term co-production for the BBC, as well as the type of controversies and anxieties it generated, as they seemed to clash with the Corporation's longstanding anti-commercialist culture and Reithian values.

Chapter three will start by presenting an historical overview of the UK and the US television landscape between the 1970s and early 1980s, including an overview of PBS's own struggle with funding (a situation that eventually contributed to the increased demand for British programming). The period also saw the BBC struggling to adapt to the increasing commercial pressures and with the troubling prospect of overseas funding in fact becoming an increasing necessity. To illustrate the period, the case of *Masterpiece Theatre*, PBS's prestigious weekly strand of British drama, will be presented. Responsible for an increase in demand for British programming in America, this strand also initiated a guarded and thus far relatively inexperienced BBC into the challenges of systematically doing business with broadcasters and – although indirectly – corporate underwriters. More importantly, the case of a drama strand was chosen rather than a single co-produced series because of its historical significance when it comes to international co-productions. Not all programmes shown on *Masterpiece Theatre* were BBC material, nor were they all co-productions; however, the strand was responsible for initiating a growing taste and consequently a growing demand for

British drama in America, eventually becoming the main venue for British TV fare - and thus one of the best sources for funding quality drama outside the licence fee.

Chapter four will present an historical overview of the television landscape in Britain between the late 1980s and the 1990s, a time during which the BBC suffered even more pressure to be profitable and show results. Such an environment led to an even wider variety of American partnerships, as well as a larger reliance on period drama to both satisfy US markets and to generate more revenue. To illustrate the period, a case study of cable channel Arts and Entertainment Network (A&E) will be presented. One of BBC's major partners at the time, A&E helped to produce a large number of period dramas – including *Pride And Prejudice*, one of the most successful and beloved drama serials to this day at the BBC.

From the early days of deals with Americans, when Time-Life would suggest guidelines to make content more 'saleable' to American outlets, to the more bluntly commercial direction taken in the 1990s - seemingly sanctioned by official reports such as *Building A Global Audience* and *Rights Of Passage*, the BBC has played the difficult part of trying to produce dramas which would be appealing enough for international markets without compromising its public service ethos. Thus, after looking at this three-decade period, at a number of co-production experiences, and at the transnational cultural economy shared by Britain and America, **chapter five** will discuss the two key aspects of British television which tend to be most referred to as 'possibly influenced' or 'threatened' by American market preferences: choice of content and production values. Often regarded as 'pre-sold commodities with an established fan base,'¹⁴ costume dramas had a guaranteed demand in America, especially at public broadcaster PBS and cable channel A&E. Emphasising such a genre, however, could mean sacrificing the more contemporary, social-issue driven TV fare, as this type of drama tends to only exist if fully British funded. Along with the so-called 'depressing' qualities of British television, reported as one of the biggest obstacles for its full international success,¹⁵ this final chapter will look into the possible effects of US market preferences over the production values and the choice of programme content at the BBC.

¹⁴ Andrew Higson, 'Crossing Over: Exporting Indigenous Heritage To The USA', in Sylvia Harvey (Ed.), *Trading Culture: Global Traffic And Local Cultures In Film And Television* (Eastleigh, UK: John Libbey Publishing, 2006), p. 212.

¹⁵ *Rights Of Passage: British Television In The Global Market*, 2005, p. 30.

2. CHAPTER ONE: National identity and British TV

‘After five weeks in New York, staring at that little TV screen, I take my pen and dip it in the blood that still streams from my eyes.’¹⁶

This chapter will look into the relationship between the medium of television, British national identity and the cultural trade with America, introducing some of the main criticisms and cultural aspects that differentiate those two broadcasting environments. It will also introduce some key historical moments, such as the so-called ‘invasion’ of American television imports in the mid-1950s and 1960s, a period marked by the end of the BBC’s monopoly, as well as by an intensely critical view of commercial aspects – usually associated with ‘American-style’ practices – of television in Britain.

2.1. Public service broadcasting ethos and national identity

Since the birth of television there have been debates over the threats of the medium to society. Defined from its early years as a ‘national medium,’¹⁷ television – like radio – has generated discussions about its potential to mesmerise, manipulate and alienate its audiences, whether it is controlled by the state or by advertisers. Hilmes refers to the subject in the introduction of her book on television history; she argues that the United States and Britain have, from the start,

defined and defended their national broadcasting systems largely in opposition to each other. The BBC’s state-chartered, publicly funded system structured itself as specifically non-commercial and non-popular, in distinct and frequently articulated contrast to its American counterpart.¹⁸

With its roots in public service, British broadcasting looked down on the American commercial model since the beginning of its activities. In fact, the first years of US TV,

¹⁶ Philip Mackie, ‘Six Hundred Hours A Week’, *Sight & Sound*, Volume 24, No 1, July-September 1954, p. 45.

¹⁷ Michele Hilmes, ‘TV Nations’, in Michele Hilmes (Ed.), *The Television History Book* (London: BFI, 2003), p.1

¹⁸ Hilmes, 2003, p.2.

referred to by scholars Michael Epstein, Jimmie Reeves and Mark Rogers as the ‘TV I era’,¹⁹ were characterised by an environment dominated by three main commercial networks. As NBC, ABC and CBS ruled the American broadcasting industry at the time, their programming tended to be tailored to the lowest common denominator.²⁰ One of the main concerns for the BBC was to avoid such a populist format, focusing instead on Director General John Reith’s more erudite public service doctrine – to educate and to inform.

In those early years of British broadcasting, branded the ‘era of scarcity’ by television historian John Ellis, the medium became intimately connected with the changes in the consumer society of the mid-twentieth century.²¹ With a limited transmission capacity at first, television became first and foremost a local venture.²² It also brought British citizens together: the topic of everyday conversations would often revolve around the previous night’s TV programmes.²³ Such integration of the medium into everyday conversations provided, very much like radio, a ‘shared culture of stories and opinions, updated every night.’²⁴

As a result, television in Great Britain remained historically associated with what is familiar and domestic, an aspect intensified by the fact that it started as a public service financed by British citizens, and therefore primarily associated with the ‘dissemination of a national culture.’²⁵ As Robin Nelson argues, the BBC distinguishes itself from public service broadcasters elsewhere in the world by its cultural influence and resulting expectations created around it as a national institution: ‘In comparable countries such as America, Canada or Australia, a free-market approach to broadcast has resulted in a small market share for PSB channels and little cultural influence.’²⁶ In her thesis on entrenched cultures within major media companies such as CNN and BBC, Lucy Küng-Shankleman also points out two latent attitudes present in the British television industry that embody its public service cultural

¹⁹ Michael Epstein, Jimmie Reeves and Mark Rogers, ‘*The Sopranos As HBO Brand Equity: The Art Of Commerce In The Age Of Digital Reproduction*’, in David Lavery (Ed), *This Thing of Ours: Investigating The Sopranos*, (New York and London: Wallflower, 2002), pp. 42-57. Although originally used to describe the developmental periods of American television, the TV I, TV II and TV III labels can also be applied to most western television markets. In fact, Medhurst (2006, p. 115-123) combines these three eras with the periods used by Ellis (2000) to describe British television history (see Appendix for a comparative table) to create a more comprehensive framework. Although not the only structure by which television history can be organised, they are especially suitable for the study of co-produced programmes, especially when it comes to a more globalised phase, as will be seen in further chapters.

²⁰ Epstein *et al.*, 2002, p. 43.

²¹ John Ellis, *Seeing Things: Television In The Age Of Uncertainty* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2000), p. 40.

²² Hilmes, 2012, p. 167.

²³ Ellis, 2000, p. 46.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Hilmes, 2003, p.1.

²⁶ Robin Nelson, *TV Drama In Transition: Forms, Values And Cultural Change* (London: Macmillan Press, 1997), p. 57.

influence: firstly a deeply rooted belief that commercial issues should not play a role in quality television; secondly, a certain arrogance about its own level of quality, one which some critics describe as an ‘enormously inflated view of its own media worth.’²⁷ Although she refers to the British television industry in general, it is not difficult to associate that attitude with the BBC, especially if one considers a variety of accounts by overseas executives, programme buyers and co-production partners,²⁸ as will be shown later on. It is Küng-Shankleman’s opinion that such anti-commercialism and arrogance are typical results of an industry dominated by public service values since its creation, clearly reflecting the BBC’s ‘commanding position within the sector.’²⁹

When it comes to the medium of television, the relationship between imported culture and indigenous identity has always been a rather ‘thorny’³⁰ one, an aspect intensified in Britain as the medium has its roots in a public service financed by the nation’s own citizens. When an organisation like the BBC – so unsympathetic to American television’s vulgar qualities – is concerned, such a relationship can become even thornier, especially as it is pressured to become more competitive without losing its fine beliefs and high principles.

2.2. The beginning of competition

At the time of its launch in 1940s America, television was a live medium. Due to time zone differences, however, anything broadcast at 8.00 pm from New York, for instance, would air live in California at 5.00 pm. Ellis points out that it did not take long before the producers of CBS’s *The Lucy Show* ‘hit upon the idea of filming their programmes rather than broadcasting them live.’³¹ Such development allowed producers to not only edit mistakes but also broadcast shows more than once, marking the birth of a worldwide market for television programmes.

Whilst the BBC had the monopoly in Britain, audiences had little contact with American TV. It was not until 1955, when ITV was launched, that shows started being imported from the United States with some regularity – as an inexpensive way to fill out schedules and attract viewers. The BBC was not a huge importer until the late 1950s, when it ultimately

²⁷ Lucy Küng-Shankleman, *Inside The BBC And CNN: Managing Media Organisations* (London: Routledge 2000), p. 73.

²⁸ See Paisner (1974), Jarvik (1999), *Building A Global Audience: British Television In Overseas Markets* (1999), Born (2004) and *Rights Of Passage: British Television In The Global Market* (2005).

²⁹ Küng-Shankleman, 2000, p. 72.

³⁰ Jamie Medhurst, ‘A (Very) Brief History of Television’, in Glen Creeber (Ed.), *Tele-Visions: An Introduction To Studying Television* (London: BFI, 2006), p. 122.

³¹ Ellis, 2000, p. 52.

recognised 'it had to respond to that changed world.'³² With a more popularised programme diet, made up not only of American series but of British programmes that were, in turn, influenced by, and based on, American formats, the BBC fought back in order to regain the audience that it was very quickly beginning to lose to the newly-arrived competition; a counter attack tactic which was, nevertheless, not free from criticisms. By the mid-to-late-1950s many US shows appeared on British television prime time: from *I Love Lucy* to *Dragnet* to *Highway Patrol*. On top of that, American influence was marked by 'the presence of several British versions, counted as home fare, of US programmes. There were British copies of *What's My Line*, *This Is Your Life*, and *The \$64,000 Question*.'³³ It was the beginning of what Paul Rixon describes as 'a love affair between the public and American programmes.'³⁴ Ellis also points out that, during this period, audiences around the world saw American products and in most cases 'they liked what they saw;' after all, he adds, this was the 'same industry that had dominated many of the world's cinema screens since the First World War.'³⁵ British audiences, who had until then been accustomed to the 'stuffy' public television style, were no different.

The love affair, however, seemed to remain limited to the viewing public; amongst the British press and some groups of the TV industry, the American presence on the small screen was not so welcome. It was not only a matter of importing American programmes, it was also the matter of importing American formats, culture and style. That was not precisely a recent issue: the influence of American commercial radio³⁶ style had been a long-lasting concern at the BBC. After all, Radio Normandie and Radio Luxembourg, both continental-based commercial stations, had since the 1930s made accessible to certain areas of Britain a diet of popular music and American-style programmes, including soap operas. According to Crisell, the number of listeners to these stations on Sundays exceeded those who stayed tuned to the BBC, showing a first sign of discontentment with the Corporation's more elitist diet of programming.³⁷ As it can be seen, the influence of the lowbrow commercial American-style has

³² Andrew Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London: Routledge 1997), p. 88.

³³ Kerry Segrave, *American Television Abroad: Hollywood's Attempt To Dominate World Television* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 1998), p. 50.

³⁴ Paul Rixon, 'The Changing Face Of American Television Programmes On British Screens', in Mark Jancovich and James Lyons (Eds.), *Quality Popular Television: Cult TV, The Industry And Fans* (London: BFI, 2003), p. 48.

³⁵ Ellis, 2000, p. 57.

³⁶ Hilmes, 2003, p.2

³⁷ Andrew Crisell, *Understanding Radio* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 22.

been regarded as a threat to the British public service standards since the early days of broadcasting. As argued by Hilmes,

From the earliest evocations of ‘American chaos’ inscribed in the founding documents of the BBC, to debates over ‘Americanisation’ of radio and television programming throughout the decades, the public service system in Great Britain as in other countries sought to avoid not only US domination of media production but its ‘vulgar’ cultural influence as well...³⁸

With the now installed competition, the moral and cultural superiority of the BBC also seemed to be at risk. With its programming more explicitly catering to the masses, ITV was entertaining not only British audiences, but also American ones, thanks to Lew Grade’s transatlantic ventures (through the ATV subsidiary). The eventual commercial success of Grade’s programmes in the 1960s (which included cult series such as *The Saint*, *The Persuaders*, *Danger Man* and *The Prisoner*) was not free from criticisms: the producer was accused of creating TV for Birmingham, Alabama, instead of Birmingham, England.³⁹ With a programme diet seen as excessively populist, ITV was, as indicated by Crisell,

winning the ratings war, but losing the battle for the support of the nation’s opinion formers – the members of parliament, the press, those in academia and the arts. In these circles there was anxiety about cultural standards, the erosion of ‘British civilisation’, and the lack of a public service ethos in ITV.⁴⁰

American imports meant low costs and high ratings, but were also associated with low quality and poor taste, hence a subject of disdain amongst some influential groups. The main criticism was, not surprisingly, that American programmes were imposing lowbrow American values upon British audiences and British culture.⁴¹ The growing criticism of the excessive use of US shows was not only restricted to media critics and policy makers; broadcasting unions and professional associations were also keen in expressing their disapproval.⁴² Nevertheless, the fear was ‘less of a sudden direct influx of American television, than of the creation of an American-styled commercial broadcaster pandering to the lowest common

³⁸ Hilmes, 2003, p.2

³⁹ Carl Ellis, ‘Lew Grade, Part 4: Embracing The 1950s’, TV Heroes Section, *Transdiffusion Broadcasting System*, 01 December 2004, <http://www.transdiffusion.org/emc/tvheroes/lewgrade/index4.php>.

⁴⁰ Crisell, 1997, p. 103.

⁴¹ See Crisell (1997), Lealand (1984) and Rixon (2006).

⁴² Segrave, 1998, pp. 51-52.

denominator.’⁴³ American culture, perceived as crass and popular, was seen by many critics as a threat to the distinctive and highbrow British culture, in particular when it came to Britain’s treasured public service broadcasting.

It is indeed possible to detect some of that unfavourable mind-set as early as 1954 – one year before commercial television had started in the United Kingdom. Writing about American television for *Sight and Sound*, Philip Mackie opens with a rather dramatic paragraph: ‘After five weeks in New York, staring at that little TV screen, I take my pen and dip it in the blood that still streams from my eyes.’⁴⁴ He goes on to say that since American broadcasters have a vast amount of airtime to fill out and a vast number of viewers to fight for, most of the final output tends to be far away from a reasonable quality level – or at least for the quality standards of a British critic:

If the American networks were reduced to a decorous British five hours a day, I must believe they would throw out most of the baby and keep a good deal of the bath-water.⁴⁵

Mackie clearly based his judgment of American TV on highbrow Reithian standards; he was criticising not only American programmes but in fact the entire concept of commercial television itself. Such an unflattering critique, written even before commercial television had been launched in Britain, seems to illustrate the kind of mood already in place. In fact, the whole debate about American broadcasting and the dangers of its vulgar cultural influence came to the fore yet again, as both ITV programming and the Television Bill were being devised that year. Mackie’s judgment seems to echo the view of many opinion formers and members of the broadcasting establishment, who doubted commercial broadcasting could ever deliver the high quality levels envisioned in the 1954 Television Bill.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, at the BBC, American imports were still being used in rather smaller proportions, at least until the advent of more open competition. In his study on American imports in the UK, Geoffrey Lealand claims that the BBC’s 1955-6 Annual Report applies a somewhat ‘apologetic tone’ when acknowledging that US imported material had in fact some

⁴³ Paul Rixon, *American Television On British Screens: A Story Of Cultural Interaction* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 39.

⁴⁴ Mackie, July-September 1954, p. 45.

⁴⁵ Mackie, July-September 1954, p. 47.

⁴⁶ As Wheatley describes, the 1954 Television Bill stated that the tone and style of ITV programming should be ‘predominantly British’. Helen Wheatley, ‘ITV 1955-89: Populism And Experimentation’, in Michele Hilmes (Ed.), *The Television History Book* (London: BFI, 2003), p. 76.

usefulness.⁴⁷ An equally reticent tone can be found in an article written by Stuart Hood (BBC Controller during the 1960s) for *Television Quarterly* in 1963. Entitled ‘American Programs and British audiences’, the article opens with the following paragraph:

In the course of the past eighteen months I have come to dread an almost standard conversational gambit which is directed at me in the form of the question - delivered with a mixture of slight dismay and vague hostility – ‘So *you* [emphasis in original] are the man who buys all these American programs [sic] we see.’⁴⁸

Bearing in mind the views on American television, it seems very likely that Hood would indeed back away from those awkward moments in which he would be expected to explain why the BBC was showing so many imports (to the extent that he wrote an entire article in a trade journal explaining the rationale behind his purchasing choices). Amongst Hood’s justifications for the use of US imports were: the quality (meaning production values that at the time were not yet possible to meet in Britain) and the commonality of language.

In order to better understand his defensive posture, it is important to take into account the historical context in which his article was written, that is, one year after the Pilkington Report had been published. The 1962 Report was, as expected, extremely critical of commercial television and of the strategic use of American programmes on both the BBC and ITV. If the term ‘people’s television’ was already regarded with suspicion, after the Pilkington Report it became pejorative;⁴⁹ and so did the American programmes. As ITV’s popularity was perceived as vulgarity – the commercial channel was even pronounced ‘worse than smallpox, black-death and greyhound racing’⁵⁰ by Lord Reith – the Committee felt that the end of the monopoly did not produce a satisfying outcome. By equating ‘popularity’ with ‘badness,’⁵¹ the Report ended up reflecting and reinforcing the deep-rooted ‘highbrow resistance’ against the concept of commercial television. Amongst its outcomes is, as seen by media historian Jamie Medhurst,⁵² the start of a ‘Golden Age’ of British television, during which there was a great deal of emphasis on quality social issue-driven drama propelled by British talent such as Dennis Potter, Tony Garnett and Ken Loach, who are credited for having turned television

⁴⁷ Geoffrey Lealand, *American Television Programmes On British Screens* (London: BFI, 1984), p. 14.

⁴⁸ Stuart Hood, ‘American Programs And British Audiences’. *Television Quarterly*, Volume II, No I, 1963, p. 20.

⁴⁹ Crisell, 1997, p. 112.

⁵⁰ Birt, 2005.

⁵¹ See Wheatley, 2003, p. 79.

⁵² Jamie Medhurst, ‘Competition And Change In British Television’, in Michele Hilmes (Ed.), *The Television History Book* (London: BFI, 2003), p. 40.

‘into an art form.’⁵³ Another outcome was the introduction of a second more ‘serious’ BBC television service in 1964; at a time when approximately 80 per cent of households in the United Kingdom had television sets,⁵⁴ BBC1 would be able to, presumably, compete for ratings with the commercial companies, while BBC2 would, preferably, supply more thought-provoking highbrow programming.

Ironically, while publicly deploring American television culture, many European public service broadcasters would send key production personnel to the US in order to ‘learn the techniques of the sort of popular generic television they were developing.’⁵⁵ Commercial stations were similarly interested in such techniques, and especially keen on gaining entry to the American market. Some of them also learned that American executives were not very impressed with British television at the time:

London Weekend Television sent executive Stella Richman to the US for a month to assess the situation before formulating production plans and inviting participation. Richman discovered, said *Variety*, that ‘apart from the obvious point that America isn’t interested in extremes of British dialect, that scripts, in the opinion of US TV men, don’t always come up to a sufficient high standard.’⁵⁶

2.3. A rather special relationship

As Hilmes appropriately reminds us, we cannot comprehend the ‘cultural history of either the United States or Great Britain without taking into account the continuous flow of mutual influence circulating between them’; a circulation that is especially resonant when it comes to the twentieth century’s dominant medium.⁵⁷ Thus, when it comes to the cultural trade relationship between Britain and the US, it is possible to attribute to British television a variety of positions that, according to Jeanette Steemers, range ‘from dominance to dependency with a number of positions in between.’⁵⁸ In her in-depth study of the global trade of British TV, Steemers begins with the alleged ‘victim position’, with Britain subject to American capital control and dependent on large volumes of programmes ‘undermining British identity, homogenising culture, encouraging consumerism and the maintenance of the

⁵³ Birt, 2005.

⁵⁴ Medhurst, 2006, p. 120.

⁵⁵ Ellis, 2000, p. 57.

⁵⁶ Mulligan, 1969, quoted in Segrave, 1998, p. 85.

⁵⁷ Hilmes, 2012, p. 3.

⁵⁸ Jeanette Steemers, *Selling Television: British Television In The Global Marketplace* (London: BFI, 2004), p. 11.

social status quo.⁵⁹ This rather extreme position can be traced back all the way to the 1950s, when the beginning of competition in Britain triggered off the importation of American shows and, as demonstrated in the previous section. Here is where the fears of cultural imperialism and Americanisation of British television culture began to build up and to be comprehensively explored in studies by Herbert Schiller, Cees Hamelink, Ariel Dorfman, Armand Mattelart and many other media researchers. Later on, as market globalisation and media conglomerates expanded, such fears would trigger the creation of regulations like the initial 14 per cent quota on foreign programmes, as well as the *Television Without Frontiers European Directive* in 1989, which stipulated that the majority of programmes broadcast should be of European origin. Yet, despite the directive's efforts to control the amount of imported programmes and ensure that European broadcasters allowed for the transmission of indigenous material, it is Jeremy Tunstall's opinion that the European Union still 'lacked the unity, the motivation and the determination to oppose the invasion.'⁶⁰ Even being less dependent on (and historically resistant to) US programmes than the advocates of this victimizing approach believe, British television has been partially influenced by American television. Rixon and Steemers believe that UK television is, to this day, influenced by its American counterpart's commercial model, programme formatting and policy trends, resulting in a certain degree of 'hybridization and neutralization'⁶¹ of British content in order to achieve commercial objectives. Kung-Shankleman points out that despite the usual contemptuousness about the quality of American television, the British broadcasting industry has in fact traditionally looked to the US, rather than to Europe, for inspiration and innovation.⁶²

Steemers carries on pointing out an extension of the 'victim position', one which is developed by Tunstall in his book *The Media Are American*: it sees Britain less as a victim of US media imperialism and more as a 'surrogate American', i.e. a 'junior media partner' of the US. Such a position, though depicting Britain in a less victimised way than the previous one, certainly still implies a certain co-dependency between both cultures. Such understanding is conceivably based on the fact that, from the 1960s onwards, the US also began to rely on Britain for programming – a trend possibly started off by Lew Grade's ITC productions,

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Jeremy Tunstall, *The Media Were American: US Media In Decline* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 279.

⁶¹ Steemers, 2004, p. 12.

⁶² Kung-Shankleman, 2000, p. 73.

which were produced for syndication in the United States.⁶³ It is also Rixon's belief that the relationship with America has never been a one-way arrangement; British ideas and programmes, as well as licensed formats, have also been bought and used by American broadcasters throughout the years, as well as by others around the globe.⁶⁴

Crisell also lucidly questions the notion of cultural imperialism and universalisation of American culture, asking how far such reservations would still be valid in an overly globalised culture. He points out that if we consider some American media organisations as 'imperialists' for broadcasting their programmes to numerous other nations, then BBC World should also be considered imperialist – with the United States being amongst the countries it broadcasts and exports to.⁶⁵ If influence works both ways, then America 'may be influenced as well as influencing',⁶⁶ even if still on a lower scale. That is not to say that cultural imperialism theories are irrelevant, given the multicultural nature of the current global society; American influence is in fact pervasive and it can clearly operate as a harmful influence on local culture and identities, not only through the medium of television but through all forms of media. However, as Crisell insightfully puts it,

(...) while it may be true that many countries have contributed to a global culture, that many cultural producers are not American, and that some of them even own large portions of the American media – the cultural currency in which most prefer to trade is, indeed, American.⁶⁷

Most of those arguments tend to assume that national cultures are seldom 'pure and indigenous', whereas culture is in itself a hybrid in constant change, and in order to survive in the long term it may need to combine with others, 'sacrificing its own distinctiveness to the new distinctiveness of the combination.'⁶⁸ Similarly, in her doctoral thesis on the consumption of transnational television, Priya Virmani recognises that identity and culture possess an inherently dynamic nature, one that is not static but responsive to the socio-economic world.⁶⁹ This is a line of thought that appears to be in sync with the third position attributed to Britain by Steemers, one that portrays this nation's television industry as a

⁶³ In fact America has been for long the single most important buyer of British television output: in 1998, it purchased US\$ 142 million worth of British imports. See Steemers, 2004, p. 44.

⁶⁴ Rixon, 2003, p. 80.

⁶⁵ Crisell, 2006, p. 147.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Crisell, 2006, p. 149.

⁶⁸ Crisell, 2006, p. 152.

⁶⁹ See Priya Virmani, *Consumption Of Transnational Television And Its Effect On Diaspora Identity*, Doctoral Thesis (Bristol, University of Bristol, September 2006).

‘complementary public service alternative’, a ‘niche purveyor of “high” culture in the form of documentaries, innovative oddball comedy, complex thrillers and period drama.’⁷⁰ Within that perspective, British and American models of television can be seen as two ‘complementary structures’ sharing a ‘transnational cultural economy’ described by Hilmes as a

powerful symbiotic machine of cultural influence that has spread long tentacles around the globe and affected the ways that culture is practiced and understood far outside the boundaries of these two nations alone.⁷¹

This transnational relationship is described by Hilmes as profoundly productive, and ‘while often resisted or even reviled, nonetheless worked powerfully to enliven and expand the cultural horizons of both nations.’⁷² The fact that United States public television has been exceedingly dependent on British programming from the start – and recently American networks have also been relying on UK formats and concepts – in conjunction with the fact that British television also has for long been dependent on American money, appears to demonstrate O’Regan’s point of ‘two contiguous and connected systems’. It is in this interchanging scenario, where benefits are – at least in theory – reciprocal, that co-productions have flourished and become one of the main forms of producing television fare in Britain and in the United States.

Before concluding this chapter, it is critical to address an additional element that plays a key role in the cultural exchange between the United States and Great Britain, one that has to do particularly with the BBC’s own internal culture. Firstly it is necessary to take into account the concept of culture within an organisation, one that has been comprehensively described by American social psychologist Edgar H. Schein. He defines it as:

(...) a pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore is taught to new members of the group as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems.⁷³

Within this approach, a corporation’s culture is thus embodied in its members’ accumulated and shared learning; a learning that, as suggested by Küng-Shankleman, ‘has

⁷⁰ Steemers, 2004, p. 13.

⁷¹ Hilmes, 2012, p. 4.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Edgar H. Schein, *Organisational Culture And Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1992), p. 12.

been acquired as the group deals with the challenges posed by the environment and by the organisation as it develops and matures.⁷⁴ Drawing on Schein's thesis, she defends that at the heart the BBC there is 'a paradigm of interrelated and unconscious shared assumptions which directs how members of that organisation think, feel and act' and influences strategic processes.⁷⁵ She boldly suggests that the BBC, like the UK itself, is 'struggling to come to terms with the end of an empire, the passing of a golden age, and seeking perhaps to play a larger role than its resources allow.'⁷⁶ In her view, after losing its protected position and being forced to a radical strategic response which clashed with its internal culture, some of the Corporation's characteristics previously seen as positive – such as 'single-minded devotion to programme-making to the exclusion of management concerns, pride in its output, a sense of uniqueness and a deep commitment to the UK' – have in fact mutated into 'introversion, ethnocentrism and inflexibility.'⁷⁷

Although a rather radical argument, it can be useful when attempting to understand how co-producing partners perceive the BBC. It contemplates the Corporation's inflexibility and disdain to commercialism often mentioned, as will be demonstrated in later chapters, by US partners and the press. Co-productions with the US were from the very beginning perceived as a 'necessary evil'; a topic as uncomfortable to BBC executives as the one of American imports was to Mr Hood in the 1960s.

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter has briefly introduced some key historical points and contextualised the central discussions about the medium of television and national identity, which became even more pertinent in Britain with the arrival of commercial TV. The main goal was to set the foundation for a discussion about the long-lasting fear of Americanisation of British broadcasting, a recurring issue since the early days of radio, brought once again to the fore in the late 1950s, as American television imports (and style) were increasingly becoming part of the British television ecosystem. Although the chapter's goal was not pinning down specific American influences, it has referred to discussions over the possibility of such influences. As formerly stated, this study is more interested in the institutional aspects of this trade relationship and in the reasons behind the BBC's inner-struggle with the idea of American co-

⁷⁴ Küng-Shankleman, 2000, p. 9.

⁷⁵ Küng-Shankleman, 2000, p. 4.

⁷⁶ Küng-Shankleman, 2000, p. 211.

⁷⁷ Küng-Shankleman, 2000, p. 220.

operation, as well as executive decisions of downplaying American involvement in the eyes of the British public.

During the early years of television in Britain, when its reach was limited and 'its address was a mixture of the local and the national,'⁷⁸ the vulgar American television style and commercial format seemed less of a threat - or at least a more manageable one. But very much like the threat imposed by continental-based commercial radio stations in the 1930s (as their radio waves began reaching British shores and influencing audience tastes), the arrival of ITV, along with the advent of pre-filmed American series, imposed a major threat to the public service broadcasting values in Britain.

Despite the fact that the BBC attempted to remain as far as possible from those alleged harmful American formats, Rixon argues that they did play an important role during the first decades of competition, having a major influence on British television's shape and form.⁷⁹ After they began to appear on British small screens and proved to be a success with audiences, their formats, pace, themes and production values began to be gradually adapted to British flavour (and budgets), influencing not only television producers but also viewers' tastes. This was what the critics and media imperialism alarmists feared the most: that those shallow quiz shows and fast-paced violent series would lower British television standards and dent the local culture and identity. That is undoubtedly a valid concern, especially considering that the mass media discourse, appearing in the early part of the last century, has been generally concerned with how American values could erode the national culture.⁸⁰

However there are ways of looking at this issue that are not so centred on the cultural imperialism approach: one could instead look at how these programmes have had a productive effect on British television culture. They could instead be seen as accountable for broadening the experiences of viewers, and therefore instigating the industry to push some boundaries and to produce some of the most esteemed television shows in Britain to date. Those so-called American 'morally dubious' programmes have helped to bring out the more progressive and bolder elements within the BBC,⁸¹ stimulating producers to go forward and create some of Britain's favourite shows such as *Steptoe and Son* and *Z Cars*, which were in turn a major influence on many British programmes which followed.⁸² Despite being rather British in

⁷⁸ Hilmes, 2012, p. 167.

⁷⁹ Rixon, 2003, p. 59.

⁸⁰ Rixon, 2003, p. 50.

⁸¹ Burton Paulu, *British Broadcasting In Transition* (London: Macmillan & Co Ltd, 1961), p. 193.

⁸² Asa Briggs, *The History Of Broadcasting In The United Kingdom: Competition*, Volume 5 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 434.

content, characters and humour, both programmes could be said to be based on American genres such as the cop show (buddy cops, episodes revolving around a crime that has been committed) and the situation comedy (thirty-minute episodes, easily recognisable characters), which could have prepared audiences for those two much-loved British programmes.

The idea of mutual influence, within a more transnational focus, could therefore throw into doubt the categories of “nation”, “national culture”, and “national identity.”⁸³ The thesis of American cultural imperialism could then be, as put by Crisell,

at once true and false: true in the sense that the culture of the United States has achieved global pre-eminence; false, or at least misleading, in the sense that this [the indigenous] culture is no purer...⁸⁴

Before moving on to the next decade and to the beginning of international collaborations on a large scale, some key concepts – such as the definition of co-production and the possible advantages and threats brought by this type of business arrangement – will be examined in the next chapter. It will also look at how international collaborations with the US were initially perceived and treated by the BBC.

⁸³ Hilmes, 2012, p. 9.

⁸⁴ Crisell, 2006, p. 152.

3. CHAPTER TWO: International television co-productions

‘At best co-production increases the production of quality programmes, at worst it could distort editorial intention; at best it enriches, at worst, it panders – in a sense the dilemma of co-production is that of television itself.’⁸⁵

This chapter will look into the definition of the term ‘international television co-production’, the different types of partnership and the benefits and drawbacks involved in such enterprises, which, driven by market pressures, started to become gradually indispensable for the survival of high-profile drama at the Corporation. Drawing on written documents, memos, letters and statements by former staff members, it also establishes the meaning of the term co-production for the BBC, as well as the type of controversies and anxieties it generated, both internally and externally, as they seemed to clash with the Corporation’s longstanding anti-commercialist culture and Reithian values.

3.1. Defining international television co-productions

For authors Richard Collins, Nicholas Garnham and Gareth Locksley, the term co-production describes ‘a wide range of collaborative activities concerned with the finance and actual production of television material;’⁸⁶ activities that by and large involve a project initiating-company and a funding partner. Similarly, writing in Horace Newcomb’s *Encyclopaedia Of Television*, Sharon Strover describes international co-production as encompassing

everything from a straightforward co-financing arrangement, in which one partner provides partial funding while another company undertakes the actual production, to more complex arrangements that involve joint venture control over projects.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Robin Scott, ‘Going It Together: An Account Of The BBC Television Service’s Experience With Co-Productions’, paper, 11 March 1976, p. 1.

⁸⁶ Richard Collins, Nicholas Garnham and Gareth Locksley, *The Economics Of Television: The UK Case* (London: Sage Publications, 1988), p. 67.

⁸⁷ Sharon Strover, ‘Coproductions International’, in Horace Newcombe (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia Of Television*, Volume 1 (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2004), p. 588.

Co-production money can in theory be negotiated before or even during the production of a programme; in fact, the boundaries of co-production and pre-sales activities tend to be by and large blurred, a point brought up by Collins *et al.* as well as Steemers, the latter defining pre-sales as the ‘purchase of programme rights for a limited period by an overseas broadcaster at the treatment or script and casting stage.’⁸⁸ Although pre-sold programmes can at times end up being categorised as co-productions, she adds that, unlike most co-productions, pre-sales do not usually entail ‘any editorial contribution by the purchaser, but depending on the level of financial contribution may apply to a wider range of rights (video, licensing).’⁸⁹ The distribution rights are, in fact, a standard and rather critical element of international co-production and pre-sales negotiations.

Amongst the advantages of international co-productions are the ability of pooling financial resources, as well as upgrading budgets and gaining better access to the partner’s markets.⁹⁰ As put by William H. Read, these deals usually have the benefit of by-passing importing quotas and qualifying as domestic product, thus guaranteeing access to at least one foreign market.⁹¹ More importantly, international collaboration can also help to minimise ‘cultural discount’, a term coined by media economists Colin Hoskins and Rolf Mirus, based on the idea that cultural differences (i.e. style, values, institutions, behavioural patterns) can limit the appeal of foreign programmes.⁹² As later put by Colin Hoskins, Adam Finn and Stuart McFayden, the issue of cultural discount tends to occur due to the fact that ‘viewers in importing markets generally find it difficult to identify with the way of life, values, history, institutions, myths, and physical environment depicted.’⁹³ As a consequence, media products rooted in a specific indigenous culture have, in their view, a diminished appeal for foreign audiences – even in cases when they share a common language or heritage. On the other hand, an internationally co-produced television programme tends to suffer less from such a discount, as in an international collaboration one partner is supposed to be given greater access to the other partner’s market knowledge and creative input.

⁸⁸ Steemers, 2004, p. 37.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Colin Hoskins, Adam Finn, and Stuart McFayden, ‘The Effect Of Cultural Differences On The International Co-Production Of Television Programs And Feature Films’, *Canadian Journal Of Communication*, Volume 23, No 4, 1998, <http://www.cjc-online.ca/viewarticle.php?id=486&layout=html>.

⁹¹ William H. Read, ‘Multinational Media’, *Foreign Policy*, No 18, 1975, p. 163.

⁹² Colin Hoskins and Rolf Mirus, ‘Reason For The US Domination Of The International Trade In Television Programmes’, *Media, Culture And Society*, Volume 10, 1988, p. 500.

⁹³ Colin Hoskins, Adam Finn and Stuart McFayden, ‘Cultural Industries From An Economic/Business Research Perspective’, *Canadian Journal Of Communication*, Volume 25, No 1, 2000, <http://www.cjc-online.ca/viewarticle.php?id=569&layout=html>.

The drawbacks of such international joint ventures include increased costs related to production co-ordination and administrative burdens, as well as the risk of losing cultural specificity (i.e. the undermining of the programme's cultural integrity). The lower the cultural discount, the higher the chances are of losing cultural specificity. On the other hand, the higher the cultural discount, the lower the chances are of a programme being well received in an importing market. There is also a chance that the compromised programme, instead of appealing to viewers in both markets, might end up appealing to neither.⁹⁴ Thus, the 'compromising' factor seems to be a major concern where this type of collaboration is concerned. Producer Belkis Bhegani also refers to such drawbacks, arguing that co-productions can be not only time consuming, but there is, additionally, 'always the danger of editorial interference. (...) In order to attract money, you have to give up something.'⁹⁵ Giving up 'something', in this case, could involve neutralising indigenous aspects to a point where the cultural integrity of the programme is put at risk. Strover notes, however, that it all depends on

the nature of the co-production arrangement: co-productions that are finance centred will be dominated by one party's creative vision – usually the party contributing the most money or putting the production together.⁹⁶

3.2. International co-productions at the BBC: fears of interference

According to Shaun Sutton, BBC's Head of Drama between 1969 and 1981 – and responsible for some of the Corporation's first international collaborations – co-production in the real sense of the term is 'sharing not only cash, but talent, staff and resources',⁹⁷ which implies that all partners participate actively in the creative process. This type of arrangement, often referred to as 'genuine' co-production, tends to be fairly rare in his opinion, since trying to incorporate many points of view tends to be rather time-consuming and even counterproductive. Sutton argues that for that reason the BBC favours what in fact should be called co-financing, namely 'pre-investments to secure transmissions of our productions in the

⁹⁴ Hoskins *et al.*, 1998.

⁹⁵ Belkis Bhegani, 'Opportunities In Partnerships', *Broadcast*, 02 September 1983, p. 20.

⁹⁶ Sharon Strover, 'Recent Trends In Coproductions: The Demise Of The National', in Farrel Corcoran and Paschal Preston (Eds.), *Democracy And Communications In The New Europe: Change And Continuity In East And West* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1995), p. 111.

⁹⁷ Shaun Sutton, *The Largest Theatre In The World: Thirty Years Of Television Drama* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1982), p.143.

investors' area,'⁹⁸ with the investor simply receiving an on-screen credit in return and not having any sort of influence over the creative decisions. An internal paper on co-productions, written in 1979, offers a better – or at least more official – definition of co-production as seen by BBC executives:

'Co-production', in BBC terms, almost always means 'co-finance'. From its partners the BBC gets money 'up-front' for programmes conceived by the BBC. This is money which actually goes into the programme budget, in return for which the BBC grants its partner in the finished programme, e.g. the right to broadcast or sell the programme in certain defined territories outside the United Kingdom. The BBC agrees to consult such partner about the script, cast or shape of each projected programme but final creative control of it remains exclusively in the hands of the BBC.⁹⁹

As explicitly stated above, rules regarding editorial control are rather strict; the Corporation is, in fact, renowned for its over-zealousness in such international ventures. In his book *The Largest Theatre In The World: Thirty Years Of Television Drama*, Sutton presents one of the reasons behind such inflexibility: 'Drama is fragile enough, without subjecting it to eroding interference of investors.'¹⁰⁰ He also recognises the challenge of maintaining control as co-production money progressively became a key factor and partners started to offer larger percentages:

As co-finance becomes more indispensable, the threat to the independence of the producer increases; once an outside investment reaches 40 per cent or more, it becomes harder to insist on artistic control.¹⁰¹

There seemed to be a notion at the Corporation that there exist two variants of co-production: co-production per se, as described earlier, with shared creative control, and co-production 'BBC-style', which is in fact co-financing or pre-sales, since there is hypothetically no shared creative control. Discussions over the appropriate 'terminology' for such activities have in fact existed at the BBC since the early 1970s. In February 1971, controller S. G. Williams circulated the internal paper *Television Co-Productions And Sales Of Programmes* with the following paragraph: 'For the sake of convenience, the single term co-production is used to embrace co-financing, the same considerations apply to both kinds of

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ John Wilkinson, 'The BBC And Co-Production', paper, 27 June 1979, p. 1.

¹⁰⁰ Sutton, 1982, p. 143.

¹⁰¹ Sutton, 1982, p. 146.

projects.’¹⁰² As a matter of fact, the growing importance of co-productions – and the growing concerns brought by them – is illustrated by the creation, just a year later, of a specific job title in charge of those projects: Head of Business Co-productions (the post, interestingly not titled Head of Business ‘Co-finances’, was at the time given to John Stringer). Worried about how co-production deals would be regarded by both the press and the unions, Robin Scott, then Controller of BBC2, wrote a memo to freshly-appointed Stringer:

I am sure that one of the main problems in selling the notion of ‘co-production’ to the Unions and the Press is precisely that the word ‘co-production’ implies participation in the production – and even control. Can you think of any alternative description which would enable us to differentiate between a co-financed programme and the real co-production which we practically never undertake?¹⁰³

In his reply, Stringer stood for the use of the word co-production as a matter of convenience:

I find it hard to think of an alternative to the term ‘co-production’ because it is so universally accepted that everyone knows what is meant. (...) I agree that the term does have implications suggesting there is participation in the production, but I would not accept that it implies any form of control.¹⁰⁴

For Sutton, Scott and other BBC executives, pre-sales and co-financing differed from co-productions mainly on the subjects of ‘partner participation’ and ‘partner interference’. Nevertheless, one wonders to what extent, in practical terms, a ‘partner interference’ is considered acceptable and where the BBC in fact draws the line, as the notion of outside interference can be rather subjective and the rules are not clearly explained - at least not in any document available at the BBC Written Archives (in spite of a folder marked *Co-Production Policies* which merely contained interdepartmental correspondence and generic statements about the importance of maintaining artistic and editorial control). Clearly the BBC feels strongly about the editorial control issue; it remains unclear, however, what in fact qualifies as acceptable or unacceptable when it comes to partner interference. It appears that the rules are more situational rather than absolute, as decisions tend to be made on a case-by-case basis.

¹⁰² S. G. Williams, ‘Television Co-Productions And Sales Of Programmes’, paper, 25 February 1971, p. 1.

¹⁰³ Robin Scott, memo to John Stringer, 25 February 1972.

¹⁰⁴ John Stringer, memo to Robin Scott, 17 March 1972.

In one of the few available official documents, a first draft of the agreement between the BBC and Time-Life for the co-production of *The Pallisers* (1974), there is one specific paragraph that reveals a little more than usual – although no record of later dealings could be found:

The programme will be made under the direct supervision of a BBC producer who will have final artistic and editorial control of each programme, but the BBC will consult with Time-Life on the form and content of the programme at all significant stages of the production.¹⁰⁵

As for WGBH, involvement would vary, according to Steemers, from ‘consultation to mutual approvals’ regarding the selection of writer, director and main cast, as well as input to the script.¹⁰⁶ In the case of *Persuasion*¹⁰⁷ (BBC/WGBH, 1995), for instance, the broadcaster’s ‘input’ seems to have been critical. According to an article in the *Daily Telegraph*, Rebecca Eaton ‘convinced’¹⁰⁸ writer Nick Dear and director Roger Mitchell to include a kiss between the protagonists in the final scene, despite the fact that there is no mention of it in Austen’s original work. None of the BBC executives interviewed for this research, however, have confirmed that episode. Here is how Eaton described it, fifteen years later:

In 1995 we simply couldn't have the character of Anne Elliot running the streets of Bath after Captain Wentworth and have him not to kiss her at the end. Although he didn't in the book, and he wouldn't have done it in the streets of Bath at the time, it felt dramatically important to have that moment. So we decided to have two versions for the final scene; the American, where they kiss, and the British, where he only touched her hand. They shot the kiss first, and the director said: ‘Fine! Let's not even do the other version!’¹⁰⁹

Such experience has opened a precedent to another famous ‘non-existent’ kiss, the one in the final scene of *Pride And Prejudice* (BBC/A&E, 1995), another international co-production broadcast just a few months later (this specific serial will be discussed at length in the next section). In fact, some of Austen’s characters have been increasingly – and shamefully, some purists would argue – caught kissing on television, or sometimes portrayed in provocative poses on posters and videocassette sleeves, as was the case of *Persuasion*’s video release in

¹⁰⁵ ‘Agreement For The Production Of *The Pallisers*’, 1973, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Steemers, 2004, p. 115.

¹⁰⁷ This version of *Persuasion* was in fact broadcast by the BBC as a one-off television drama, whereas in the US market it was picked up for theatrical release before it aired on PBS.

¹⁰⁸ Tristan Davies, ‘To Kiss Or Not To Kiss’, *Daily Telegraph*, 7 January 1995, p. 12.

¹⁰⁹ Rebecca Eaton, ‘*Masterpiece Theatre: Creating The Past Through Drama*’, seminar at the Massachusetts Historical Society, October 2010, video available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXXmrCTTBgs>

the United States (Fig. 1). As observed by Higson, in an attempt to widen the appeal of the film for video rental, the

sleeve showed two entirely different actors, who have no part in the production, involved in a much more passionate and revealing pose and suggesting a much racier film.¹¹⁰

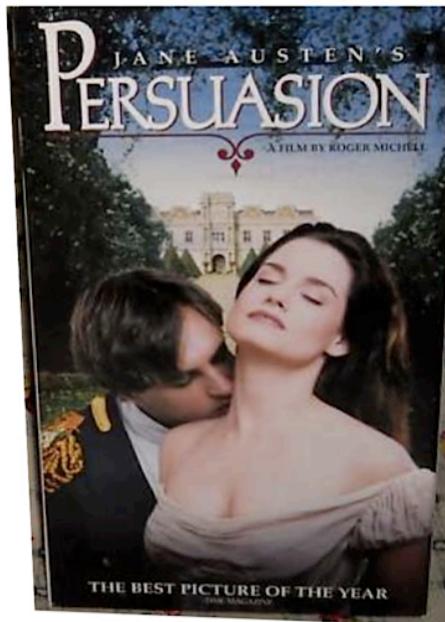


Fig. 1: *Persuasion*'s videocassette was released in the US market in February 1995. As mentioned by Higson, the cover portrays two unknown actors in a rather passionate pose; neither the scene nor the actors actually appear in the production. It is commonly referred to by Austen's fans as 'The Nibbler Cover' (see more at <http://www.pemberley.com/pemb/adaptations/persuasion>)

One cannot help but wonder if, had those programmes not been international collaborations, such public displays of affection between Regency characters would still have happened. There is, of course, the question of translating a cultural work into a different medium, which every so often requires adjustments; in fact Giddings and Selby call attention to a tendency to abandon the tradition 'of faithfully rendering a classic novel in favour of rewriting, or considerably readjusting', in a way that they will better 'suit the perceived and expected feminist or politically correct requirements of today.'¹¹¹ Cultural differences between British and American audiences are indeed presented by Eaton as key reasons for editorial interference: "'(...) a co-produced programme must make sense to a US audience, and that may involve script changes.'¹¹² Her position in the matter of editorial interference, however, seems to be rather inconsistent. In 1986, during a seminar celebrating the fifteenth

¹¹⁰ Higson, 2006, p. 208.

¹¹¹ Robert Giddings and Keith Selby, *The Classic Serial On Television And Radio* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 191.

¹¹² Rebecca Eaton quoted in Angus Towler, 'Getting To Co You', *Television Today*, 12 July 1990, p. 20.

anniversary of *Masterpiece Theatre*, she declared that WGBH in fact saw itself as ‘an investor in British television drama’, and, as such, its influence was directly proportional to the size of its cheque.

(...) about 50 per cent of what we do at this point is acquisition, and 50 per cent is co-production, so we are like an investor in British television drama, and like an investor we have to try to make our voice heard but not interfere. How well they hear you has to do with the size of the figure you have invested in their project.¹¹³

During a 2010 seminar, however, she reinforced the fact that programmes were ‘made in England’, and that WGBH was ‘just a co-producer’: ‘I don’t make them, I’m just not stupid enough to turn them down.’¹¹⁴ In that same occasion, she also emphasised WGBH’s commitment to historical authenticity and ‘literary accuracy’ – different from other broadcasters who, in her view, did not have such high standards and tended to ‘fabricate’ the past in a Hollywood fashion: ‘[accuracy] that’s what you won’t find on Showtime and HBO.’¹¹⁵ In that same speech, just a few minutes later, she contradicts herself, stating that she was, after all, in the business of drama, and not documentaries:

Yes, that [the kiss at end of *Persuasion*] was inaccurate. And Jane Austen was probably revolving in her grave. But my obligation is to my audience. I’m not a teacher; I’m a television producer.¹¹⁶

Apart from rather generic and vague statements, former BBC executives John Willis (who has worked as a production executive for both the BBC and WGBH)¹¹⁷ and Mark Shivas (BBC’s Head of Drama between 1987 and 1993) have not cited one specific occurrence when asked about WGBH’s level of interference. ‘These projects are run by the BBC. Of course WGBH has a voice in script and casting, but the BBC leads the way,’¹¹⁸ declared Willis. ‘WGBH liked to have actors their audiences might recognise. (...) If you’re going to take co-production money from Americans, or anyone, you have to take into account their wishes a little bit,’¹¹⁹ replied Shivas.

¹¹³ Rebecca Eaton, ‘The Fifteenth Anniversary Of *Masterpiece Theatre*’, seminar at the Museum of Broadcasting, 1986, video available at <http://www.shemadeit.org/meet/summary.aspx?m=158>

¹¹⁴ Eaton, 2010.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ After working at WGBH as VP of National Programming he subsequently joined the BBC as Director of Factual and Learning in 2003.

¹¹⁸ John Willis, interview, London, 17 September 2007.

¹¹⁹ Mark Shivas, interview, London, 22 October 2007.

A&E, on the other hand, was able to provide much larger co-production funds; and larger budgets meant, as implied by Steemers, insistence on a higher degree of creative involvement.¹²⁰ Powell confirmed, during an interview, that

A&E did put in more money, and they did want to have much more control... Because they were cable, because they were putting in more money, because they were rivals with WGBH.¹²¹

While both A&E and WGBH were fighting for the same niche audiences, A&E was a more aggressive and business oriented organisation. Unlike its non-cable rival WGBH, A&E was a commercial channel required to turn a profit, and having ‘no particular commitment to British drama per se’, as observed by Steemers, it demanded a higher level of consultation in order to match the ‘preferences of its target audience and advertisers.’¹²² The author bases her argument mainly on her personal interview with A&E’s Vice President of Film, Drama and Performing Arts Programming, Delia Fine. On that occasion, the executive explained to Steemers how co-production contracts contained a detailed list of approvals for the scripts, the director, the cast, rough cuts and final cuts, and how A&E sometimes edited programmes down to hook US audiences at the beginning of a show:

‘In general we need a story to get going faster. (...) I think the UK audience is much more patient sitting around for the first twenty minutes if need be for something to take off.’¹²³

Fine also explains how, with American financial contribution becoming more important throughout the years, there was a shift in attitude as British producers became more receptive to “‘real creative partnership’ rather than simply a financial one.”¹²⁴ She adds:

‘In the beginning everybody just wanted our money and didn’t want to hear anything from us, and were somewhat resentful when they did. As time goes by though I find that most of the producers who I talk with are very open and very willing to think about collaboration and very more receptive to the fact that it is a partnership and needs to be a partnership.’¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Steemers, 2004, p. 116.

¹²¹ Jonathan Powell, interview, London, 17 September 2007.

¹²² Steemers, 2004, p. 115.

¹²³ Delia Fine, 2002, quoted in Steemers, 2004, p. 116.

¹²⁴ Delia Fine, 2002, quoted in Steemers, 2004, p. 115.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

Such resentment mentioned by Fine seems to have its origins in what Powell calls the ‘Corporation’s arrogance’: initially accustomed to having control over every aspect of a production, the BBC felt the need to review its attitude as financial pressures increased. Although Powell does defend that the co-producer’s interference was never ‘that radical’, consisting basically of ‘seeing scripts and giving notes, discussing casting and choice of director,’¹²⁶ the BBC was perceived by both the press and the industry¹²⁷ as having reviewed its strict policies once its power of bargain diminished. In fact, even in the very early years of such international transactions, Sutton had already declared that: ‘(...) had they [the investors] contributed a larger percentage of the total cost, it might have been harder to retain artistic control.’¹²⁸

Jumping forward three decades – in an attempt to find a less vague definition of partner interference – can also prove unsatisfying: the 2007 *BBC’s Editorial Guidelines On External Relationships* simply states that in

...very rare circumstances, for strictly public service reasons, it may be possible to supplement licence fee or grant-in-aid funding with co-funding from suitable non-commercial bodies.¹²⁹

Just like the 1974 co-production agreement with Time-Life for *The Pallisers*, the 2007 guidelines also reinforce the general principle that the Corporation must retain editorial control for a co-funded programme at all times:

When entering into an external relationship we must ensure that: our editorial impartiality and integrity are not compromised and that we retain editorial control of our output.¹³⁰

Only very recently has the BBC published detailed instructions for visually identifying third-party co-producers on programmes closing credits (the rules seem to be mostly directed to independent companies and in-house BBC departments). According to such guidelines – which even include a measurement grid (Fig. 2) – a co-production partner must appear only as

¹²⁶ Powell, 17 September 2007.

¹²⁷ Aside from Fine, the same point is made by Collins *et al.* (1988, p. 6) Comely (1986, p. 3) and Steemers (2004, p. 116).

¹²⁸ Sutton, 1982, p.144.

¹²⁹ ‘BBC Editorial Guidelines, External Relationships’, *BBC Website*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/edguide/externalrel>.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

part of the final card, together with the BBC corporate logo, during the final programme credits. The partner's logo must:

- occupy no more than 10% of a 4 x 3 screen format;
- appear over the same background as the programme's other credits, or over black;
- keep animation to a maximum of 2.5 seconds' duration, but with no accompanying special sound or jingle.¹³¹

Fig. 2: Co-producer's logo measurement grid



The fact that guidelines have now been stipulated and made available online points not only to a more branding-literate organisation, but also to a more result-oriented and co-production-familiarised BBC, aspects that will be further examined in the following chapters.

3.3. Putting a spin on co-productions

Criticisms over the implications of international funding of BBC shows were easily found in the trade press and the Corporation was fully aware of that from the start. John Stringer is thus quoted in a 1976 *New York Times* article: ““(...) we insist on owning at least 51 per cent of the project, if only for appearances. We are a public corporation, accountable to the public...”¹³² In a later instance, an article published in *The Listener* warns about the risks of letting a commercially and politically aggressive organisation such as Mobil Oil influence British programming. ‘That it [Mobil] should have anything to say about the content of British television, even at third hand, must be a cause for concern,’¹³³ argues critic Brian Winston.

¹³¹ ‘BBC Commissioning: Closing Branding For Co-productions’, *BBC Website*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/commissioning/tv/production/branding-guidelines-and-logos/in-house-productions/closing-branding-for-in-house-co-productions.shtml>.

¹³² Stringer, quoted in Brown, 9 March 1976, p. 48.

¹³³ Brian Winston, ‘The Mid-Atlantic Wash’, *The Listener*, 03 March 1983, p. 34.

Tony Smith (head of the BFI in the 1980s) is also quoted in the article expressing very similar fears: “[T]he presence of US money, in the form of underwriter, benevolent though it might be, threatens to drive out that indigenous image.”¹³⁴

With that in mind, it is easy to envision the purpose of a document such as *Co-Productions: The Why, How and What*, written in 1972 by the BBC Publicity Office. Found at the BBC Written Archives, such a document – similar to what one calls a ‘press pack’ nowadays – attempts to provide a sort of FAQ (frequently asked questions) for the press, possibly part of a public relations effort to clarify the Corporation’s activities. Signed by Keith Smith who, according to the 1970’s *BBC Staff List*, was Chief Publicity Officer, it is a very didactic and comprehensive document, organised in a question-and-answer format; the 17 questions range from more general aspects such as the definition of ‘partnership’ to more specific ones such as the reasons to search for funding overseas.

The very existence of such a document reveals the surfacing anxieties at the BBC, as it attempts to meticulously justify the presence of American funding. The reason presented in the document for co-producing programmes is singular: costs. ‘We have the ideas, the know-how and the experience to tackle big projects, but we don’t always have the money’, it claims. To illustrate the point, it goes on to say: ‘*The British Empire* and *War And Peace*, for example, are so big and expensive we couldn’t possibly have produced them, in the way they should be produced [emphasis in original], on our own.’¹³⁵ In other words, programmes were still British at heart, they were only short of British funding: a carefully devised rhetoric to appease critics and reassure licence-fee payers that there should be no reason for concern.

Question number seven, for instance, asks ‘Why not sell these big productions abroad to recoup your money, instead of producing them with someone else?’ The subsequent reply is rather emphatic:

Because the only sure [emphasis in original] way of making enough money from sales abroad to cover our costs is to make programmes deliberately aimed at and tailored for, a foreign audience. That’s not the way the BBC works. (...) We don’t make programmes to sell abroad. We make programmes to be seen here.¹³⁶

The next question shows the same type of concern over tailoring programmes for foreign audiences tastes: ‘Surely if your co-producer puts money into the programme, you have to

¹³⁴ Winston, 03 March 1983, p. 34.

¹³⁵ Keith Smith, ‘Co-Productions: The Why, How And What’, BBC Publicity Office, 12 January 1972, p. 2.

¹³⁶ Smith, 12 January 1972, p. 3.

make it acceptable to his country's viewers?' In that case the Corporation's reply is as follows:

If the co-producers think the programme will go down well in their country, and are prepared to help finance it, all well and good. But if the price of their financial help is changing the idea of the programme, or its style, in a way we do not agree with, then the answer is no.¹³⁷

Question number 14 addresses the reasons for frequently co-producing with American company Time-Life Films, as the BBC explains:

They have a very good reputation, they understand television, and, most importantly, they already have strong connections as our distributors in the US. (...) They are enthusiastic about our projects; they are prepared to invest enough money to enable us to produce series on the scale they should be produced, and they are happy to leave us to produce the programme.¹³⁸

Two years later, nevertheless, a not so 'enthusiastic' memo from Time-Life¹³⁹ arrived at the BBC, labelling one-third of the programmes 'unsaleable' and recommending a few 'improvements' in content and cast (the detailed content of this memo and the extent of the role played by Time-Life will be fully discussed in the next chapter). As revenues proved disappointing, Time-Life did not remain as 'happy' to leave the Corporation produce programmes its own way, neither did it refrain from trying to interfere when cultural discount issues began to affect sales. The BBC, for its part, remained adjusting its discourse in order to minimise the role played by American partners and the fact that, along with the money, sometimes comes the need to compromise.

3.4. A 'touch of the Grades': the rise of co-productions

As pointed out by Scott in the 1976 internal paper *Going It Together*, co-productions did not truly make their mark until 1970. After fully funding lavish productions like *The Forsyte Saga* and *The Six Wives Of Henry VIII* in the late 1960s, the BBC had no other alternative but to search for funding outside the licence fee in order to maintain such high standards. The worldwide success of such productions did play an important part in this move, as funding

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Smith, 12 January 1972, p. 5.

¹³⁹ Bruce Paisner, memo to the BBC Television team, 12 March 1974.

offers began to appear, in Scott's words, on an 'almost embarrassing scale.'¹⁴⁰ By the time *Going It Together* was written, *Masterpiece Theatre* – PBS's prestigious British drama strand – had already entered its fifth year on the American public network; thus the 'embarrassing scale' mentioned by Scott was a reference to the increase in US funding which came with the growing demand created by that strand. An additional 'embarrassment' could include the fact that the BBC was practically taken by surprise by the size of such demand (52 episodes a year for *Masterpiece Theatre* alone); or the fact that, despite having struck gold, its obligations as a public corporation accountable to the British public prevented it from truly taking full advantage of that type of business.

Another internal paper goes even further and clearly justifies the need for foreign funding: 'Our ambition continues to outstrip our resources,'¹⁴¹ it claims. It also reinforces that from 1970 onwards it had become virtually impossible for the Corporation to continue fully funding lavish drama productions 'without finding some enhancement.'¹⁴² Therefore by 1971 BBC2 alone had obtained over £750,000 from co-finance,¹⁴³ and between 1971 and 1973 BBC2 took in over £2,200,000 (or some 60 per cent of BBC Television's total co-production income). With only one-third of the total BBC Television programme budget, BBC2 was automatically the main beneficiary from international co-productions.¹⁴⁴ By the mid-1970s, as inflation and the decline in sales of colour TV sets reduced the income from the licence fee, budget cuts at the BBC aggravated the situation even further. By 1976, foreign investment in BBC programmes had reached the neighbourhood of US\$ 3 million,¹⁴⁵ and by 1978-79 it went as far as £5.5 million (5.7 per cent of the annual drama production).¹⁴⁶

Embarrassing or not, the sudden demand from America in the early 1970s apparently caught the Corporation slightly unprepared to deal with highly profit-driven corporations such as Time-Life and Mobil. 'A year ago [1970] we would not have expected to be discussing possible dangers of being too successful in obtaining co-production money', reports an internal paper dated 25 February 1971.¹⁴⁷ Although foreign investment and joint deals with America had existed occasionally since the 1960s at both the BBC and ITV,¹⁴⁸ it was the first

¹⁴⁰ Scott, 11 March 1976, pp. 2-3.

¹⁴¹ Wilkinson, 27 June 1979, p. 2.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Scott, 11 March 1976, p. 1.

¹⁴⁴ Wilkinson, 27 June 1979, p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ Brown, 09 March 1976, p. 48.

¹⁴⁶ Wilkinson, 27 June 1979, p. 3.

¹⁴⁷ Williams, 25 February 1971, p. 5.

¹⁴⁸ See more on Ellis, 2004.

time broadcasters from across the Atlantic had shown that much interest, forcing the BBC to promptly review its own policies – and its own discourse – towards international partnerships (the adaptation process and the constant readjustment to this new reality, as well as the repercussions within the BBC and the industry, will be explored in a later chapter).

The BBC is, as it is well known, formally prohibited from direct association with sponsors due to Clause 12 of its Licence, the intention of which is mainly ‘to prevent the BBC from becoming involved with external pressures.’¹⁴⁹ The 1971 paper *Television Co-Productions And Sales Of Programmes* discusses the concerns arising from the idea of the Corporation receiving outside money. It mentions that if Clause 12 was

strictly interpreted this could prohibit any kind of co-production involving the receipt of money from another partner without first obtaining the permission of the Minister of Post and Telecommunications. However, it seems reasonable to view our activities against the intention of the clause, which could be regarded as prohibiting the BBC from receiving money which would influence its domestic output. It is for this reason that the Legal Adviser has advised (...) that any payments received in respect of co-production should not be related contractually to our domestic output but to rights acquired for showing or distribution overseas. This is our current practice for co-productions.¹⁵⁰

As the document mentions, any payments received from an international co-production partner should always be associated to rights acquired for showing or distributing the programme overseas. The choice of partner is also critical: they must never be commercial companies (consequently the choices are limited to either reputable broadcasters or distributors like Time-Life). In *Going it Together*, Stringer also assesses the inherent problems had the BBC ever decided to deal directly with commercial companies when co-producing with America. He points out that such practice would inevitably create problems for the BBC:

[I]f we dealt directly with Mobil or Ford in the USA why not with Shell or Leyland in the UK. If we co-produce with UK companies, it would almost certainly lay us open to charges of contravening the Licence.¹⁵¹

One of the best examples of the type of internal dilemmas and mixed feelings generated by co-productions at that time can be found in a document called *The BBC and Co-Production: A*

¹⁴⁹ David Attenborough, minute to Programme Management Board, 02 March 1971, p. 2.

¹⁵⁰ Williams, 25 February 1971, p. 1.

¹⁵¹ John Stringer, ‘Co-Productions Practice’, paper, 11 March 1976, p. 10.

Personal Note, written in 1979 by playwright/screenwriter Alan Plater, member of the General Advisory Council. This was a special counselling body created in 1934 with the goal of obtaining constructive criticism and advice over the whole field of the Corporation's activities.¹⁵² Plater presented his personal analysis of the controversial subject of co-productions. While recognising the need for extra-funding through the inescapable exploitation of international markets, he also alerts to some imminent risks:

Co-production is simultaneously exhilarating in its possibilities and alarming in its implications: very much like life, you might say. (...) Co-production money is icing. It must not be mistaken for the cake, and we must continue to bake our own bread.¹⁵³

At the end of the document, he even daringly proposes:

Perhaps we could use a little more commercial buccaneering in the financing and world exploitation of our own programmes. Just as ITV could use the occasional Reithian injection, maybe we could use an occasional touch of the Grades.¹⁵⁴

By 'touch of the Grades' Plater meant LWT's Michael Grade, at the time Director of Programmes, referring therefore to the less strict policies of the commercial broadcaster. Although unthinkable during Reith's reign, such a relaxation of policies and more aggressive approach began to be contemplated as a possible step forward, one that would allow the Corporation to adapt to the new transnational reality of the market. By the tone of the internal discussions prior to that, as well as the ones which followed, it seems clear that some BBC executives were aware of the need for change; they were also in search of ways to remain answering to the British paying public and to their own organisation's culture.

3.5. Masking transnationalism

A provisional way of dealing with such a thorny matter was embraced at the time: by not openly crediting US co-producers on publicity material and on programme closing credits, the BBC seemed to be avoiding stirring up trouble. The subject of co-production credits was

¹⁵² Maggie Brown, 'Advisers Want More Say Over BBC Policy', *The Independent*, 27 March 1993, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/advisers-want-more-say-over-bbc-policy-general-council-seeks-a-clearly-defined-role-1500071.html>.

¹⁵³ Alan Plater, 'The BBC And Co-Production: A Personal Note', paper to the General Advisory Council, 28 June 1979, p. 5.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

discussed at length during a BBC Programme Review meeting¹⁵⁵ (and even addressed in the previously mentioned press pack). In a memo directed to the BBC Features Group, Noble Wilson (assistant to Aubrey Singer, then Head of Features) commented on the reservations arisen at the meeting on crediting co-produced programmes as such. ‘There was a feeling that they [co-production credits] were often included unnecessarily and added nothing to the interest.’¹⁵⁶ He ends the memo by communicating the final decision on the matter: ‘coproduction [sic] credits should not normally appear in *Radio Times* unless there was a good public interest or contractual reason for doing so.’¹⁵⁷ Thus, based on the assumption that such technicality would not be relevant for British audiences, the BBC chose to avoid openly publicising co-produced programmes as such. A strategic decision that also appears to be one of extreme caution, as such discretion could conceivably take the heat off of a subject causing so much controversy – internally and externally.

Another way to reinforce its commitment to indigenous cultural specificity was to build a strong reputation for being strict and over-zealous when entering international deals, a discourse found in most internal documents¹⁵⁸ and publicity material related to the subject of co-productions. Formally prohibited from direct association with sponsors, downplaying the presence (and possible influence) of American partners could be seen as a strategic move to lessen the controversy. In her 2012 book, Hilmes draws on the work of film scholar Mette Hjort to build a valid argument: that there is in fact a distinction between ‘marked’ and ‘unmarked’ transnationalism.¹⁵⁹ In Hjort’s view, when transnationalism is ‘marked’ it is not difficult for the viewer to recognise different national elements ranging from subject matter to style in that specific transnational programme; when ‘unmarked’, however, the international co-operation and co-financing circumstances of a programme are not necessarily explicit to the public. Based on that, Hilmes raises an interesting point: the balance between marked and unmarked transnationalism is a key factor in considering the directions British-American exchanges have taken.¹⁶⁰ British programmes in the American context, she argues, have always tended to have their British roots decidedly and enthusiastically marked, as long as this attribute provided cultural value and appealed to the audience in question. While openly marked ‘Britishness’ would work well for programmes aired on PBS and A&E, the same rule

¹⁵⁵ Noble Wilson, ‘Coproduction Credits’, memo to Features Group, 10 March 1972.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ See Attenborough (1971), Williams (1971), Stringer (1976) and Plater (1979).

¹⁵⁹ Mette Hjort, 2010, quoted in Hilmes, 2012, p. 257.

¹⁶⁰ Hilmes, 2012, p. 257.

would not necessarily apply for American commercial networks. That could be the rationale behind the variety of British symbolisms on which PBS's *Masterpiece Theatre* – and the strand's respective underwriter, Mobil Oil – capitalised for years. While Americans were prepared to pay for 'a certain kind of Britishness,'¹⁶¹ be it for practical or symbolic reasons, such Britishness apparently did not involve the presence of the BBC in the series' promotional posters and other publicity materials (as will be shown in the following chapter).



Fig. 3: Closing credits for BBC's *The Duchess Of Duke Street* (1976) and *The Mayor Of Casterbridge* (1978), both produced in association with Time-Life Films. As can be seen, American involvement in the funding is not mentioned and the Corporation signs both productions on its own.

In the meantime, American involvement in the funding of British high-profile programmes was, in the words of Hilmes, 'not a fact to be trumpeted aloud,'¹⁶² not only before regulatory bodies but also before the press and the British public (although openly marked when it came to popular US imports being used to build viewership).¹⁶³ That would justify the absence of any acknowledgment of Time-Life's funding on the end credits of both *The Duchess Of Duke Street* and *The Mayor Of Casterbridge* (Fig. 3) - even though the American company is credited on the back cover of the later-released DVD version (Fig. 4). As broadcasting moved towards the age of niche marketing (TV II era), the extent to which American partners' demands were to be taken into account and the extent to which those collaborations should be openly marked to licence-paying audiences seemed to be the real burning questions at the Corporation.

¹⁶¹ Hilmes, 2012, p. 258.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

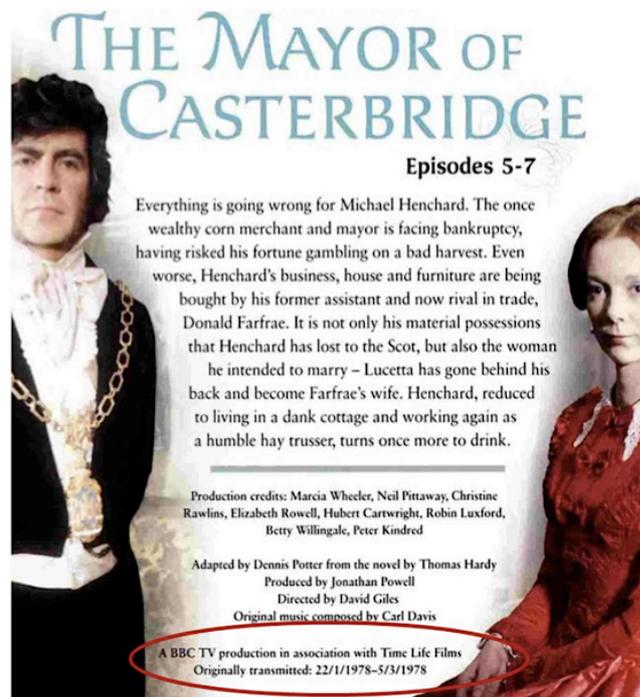


Fig. 4: *The Mayor Of Casterbridge* DVD's back cover, which, differently from the serial's end credits, explicitly informs the association with Time-Life Films.

3.6. Conclusion

By presenting the definition of international television co-production as seen by the BBC (a definition which by the early 1970s was not yet entirely clear for the Corporation), this chapter has examined the type of anxieties such ventures generated inside the organisation, as its executives became growingly – and uncomfortably – aware of the indispensable nature of outside funding for the survival of first-rate programming.

From an economic point of view, international television co-productions indeed make sense as they optimise budgets and allow easier access to a partner's market. For media economists such as Hoskins *et al.* and Collins *et al.*, they have a better chance to appeal to a larger audience if cultural discount is minimised. On the other hand, it is this very same aspect that could also put a programme's cultural specificity at risk - one that Clause 12 of the Licence is concerned with when stipulates that the BBC should be prevented from 'becoming involved with external pressures.'¹⁶⁴ Usually putting in the largest percentage of the budget – what would in theory guarantee power of veto to outside interferences – the Corporation has maintained over the years a carefully constructed discourse of unconditional editorial control.

¹⁶⁴ David Attenborough, minute to Programme Management Board, 02 March 1971, p. 2.

As observed in numerous memos and papers – which multiplied in number as the demand for cheap yet high-quality programming grew in America – such matter has concerned BBC executives since the early years of international deals. In fact, the Corporation has struggled even with the definition of the term co-production itself, as internal discussions ranged from the less controversial terminology for such deals to the acceptable type of partners. With offers from the US increasing on an ‘almost embarrassing scale’, as stated by Scott, so did the need to justify such funding strategy to licence fee payers, as well as to critics and even to the Corporation itself. Such concerns with public accountability – clearly expressed in Stringer’s ‘if only for appearances’ comment – are visibly behind the decision of not openly crediting co-producers in mainstream media or in programme ending credits, as well as producing excessively didactic, nearly apologetic, press packs about the business of co-production.

It remains to be seen how and when such policies in fact started and whether they have changed – or at least become more accommodating – over the years, under different economic and political contexts, different chairmanships and with different partners. The next chapters will look into how co-productions grew in importance not only at the BBC but in the British television landscape as a whole, and at the process undergone by the Corporation in order to better adapt to the new panorama.

4. CHAPTER THREE: Funding drama in the 1970s and early 1980s

‘We need now and increasingly in the future to secure a proper and profitable share of the US market – but we do not want to Americanise our programmes.’¹⁶⁵

This chapter will start by presenting an historical overview of the television landscape in Britain between the 1970s and early 1980s, a time which saw the BBC coping with increasing pressures as well as with the possibility that overseas funding could become an actual necessity – one that in the eyes of some critics did not agree with the Corporation’s public service ethos.

To illustrate this period, during which America’s own public broadcaster also struggled with funding limitations, the case of *Masterpiece Theatre*, PBS’s prestigious weekly strand of British drama, will be presented. By creating a large demand for UK programming in America, the strand initiated the thus far relatively inexperienced BBC in the challenges of dealing with US broadcasters on a regular basis – and, although indirectly, also with corporate underwriters. This specific strand has been chosen because of its historical significance; as it ultimately became the main venue for British TV fare in America, *Masterpiece Theatre* also turned out to be one of the best sources for funding British quality drama outside the licence fee.

4.1. From Reith’s citizens to Thatcher’s consumers

As mentioned earlier, the late 1960s was a time of ‘realist flowering,’¹⁶⁶ when the BBC, according to scholar Jason Jacobs, dared to go beyond its ‘static bourgeois and theatrical drama tradition.’¹⁶⁷ It was a time depicted by many as unique in British broadcasting culture, as professionals such as Loach, Garnett and Potter were helping to build an indigenous television culture with radical thought-provoking works. *Up The Junction* (1965), *Stand Up*, *Nigel Barton* (1965) and *Cathy Come Home* (1966), for instance, covered a variety of polemic

¹⁶⁵ Scott, 27 March 1974, p. 5.

¹⁶⁶ Richard Armstrong, ‘Social Realism’, *Screen Online*, BFI website, <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/1037898/index.html>.

¹⁶⁷ Jason Jacobs, ‘Early Television In Great Britain’, in Michele Hilmes (Ed.), *The Television History Book* (London: BFI, 2003), p. 72.

themes that ranged from teenage pregnancy and abortion to extreme poverty and dysfunctional homes. Such critically acclaimed works – mostly single-plays aired under the BBC's *Wednesday Play* strand – reflected the kind of social realism also portrayed in British cinema at the time. With these exceptionally risky television dramas portraying harsher representations of social life in Britain, the BBC, according to Jacobs, regained its reputation 'with programmes that outshone those of the ITV networks.'¹⁶⁸

However, while the 1960s and early 1970s were regarded as the 'Golden Age' of British television drama, Medhurst believes the arrival of Margaret Thatcher marked the end of this fruitful period.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, the following decades of Thatcher's rule (1979-90) were, politically and economically, significantly challenging for the United Kingdom; strikes, unemployment, violence, recession and inflation were rising at an alarming rate. By the late 1970s there were also technological challenges, as the broadcasting industry was coping with pressures like increasing production costs, the advent of the VCR and new technologies such as satellite and cable, which in turn led to a more fragmented audience. Additionally, by 1982 the fourth terrestrial channel was launched. For public broadcasting, the country's rising inflation rate meant that 'the BBC funds were whittled away as the real value of the licence fee declined. Increases in the license fee were always below what the BBC asked for and as a result the BBC was throughout the 1980s in continuous financial difficulty.'¹⁷⁰ The late 1970s and early 1980s period saw the beginning of a dramatic shift in the ecology of British broadcasting; as historian Kevin Williams argues, it witnessed the transformation of Reith's citizens into Thatcher's consumers.¹⁷¹ Thatcher's government, renowned for its commitment to a free-market ideology, was evidently in conflict with the public service ethos; in the words of another historian, Tom O'Malley, 'the government signalled its disapproval of the ethos of public service television by attacking the BBC throughout the 1980s,'¹⁷² devising policies that would question the continuance of the Corporation. For instance, Thatcher favoured the idea that the BBC should take advertising; not an uncommon practice in public service broadcasting elsewhere. To this end, the Peacock Committee (1985-6) was established, though it ultimately concluded that the Corporation should remain licence fee-funded.

¹⁶⁸ Jacobs, 2003, p. 72.

¹⁶⁹ Medhurst, 2003, p. 40.

¹⁷⁰ Kevin Williams, *Get Me A Murder A Day! A History Of Mass Communication In Britain* (London: Arnold, 1998), p 172.

¹⁷¹ Not surprisingly, the term 'citizen-consumer' is now used by regulating body Ofcom to refer to present day multichannel landscape viewers. Williams, 1998, p. 171.

¹⁷² Tim O'Malley, 'Post-War Television In Britain: BBC And ITV', in Michele Hilmes (Ed.), *The Television History Book* (London: BFI, 2003), p. 87-8.

However, it also judged that British broadcasting should become more market-driven. In fact, not only broadcasting but public services and businesses on the whole were expected to be cost-effective and economically run during that government. As Robert Giddings and Keith Selby point out, such a profit-driven mindset was eventually to ‘affect production, how programmes were funded and the kind of programmes which actually got made.’¹⁷³

4.2. The American Public Broadcasting Service

In the United States, the late 1970s and early 1980s period was marked by dramatic changes as well. The commercial television industry, once dominated by three long-established networks, was irreversibly ‘damaged by upstart newcomers such as Murdoch's Fox Network and the (government-sponsored) development of a nimble, innovative cable industry.’¹⁷⁴

According to Steemers, when the opportunities for selling British programmes dried up on network television by the late 1960s, new opportunities would emerge with the creation of PBS in 1969.¹⁷⁵ As commercial networks ‘had shown no interest in backing BBC productions,’¹⁷⁶ with few exceptions such as NBC, which co-financed *Robinson Crusoe* in 1974, the arrival of a public service counterpart brought the promise of a steadier partnership. But as the BBC would soon find out, PBS’s shared public service philosophy also came with funding limitations.

Public television in America differs considerably from the BBC in its history, its structure and its funding. Its origins are found in an initial alliance of university radio stations that moved into television in the early 1950s. The Broadcasting Act in 1967 created the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), which in turn created the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), a national non-profit network of stations. CPB would receive and distribute federal funding to local PBS stations, which were responsible for their own programme schedules.¹⁷⁷ Thus PBS would rely mainly on government funding, as well as corporate sponsorship and viewers’ charitable contributions through annual pledge drives, a format that persists to this day (additional support for *Masterpiece Theatre* is currently provided by the Masterpiece Trust, created in 2011). As Daniel Marcus puts it, due to the lack of an independent funding base, public television in America ended up being subject to ‘the vagaries of Washington politics, and to reliance on contributions from the same corporations

¹⁷³ Giddings and Selby, 2001, p. 54.

¹⁷⁴ Küng-Shankleman, 2000, p. 24.

¹⁷⁵ Steemers, 2004, p. 110.

¹⁷⁶ Brown, 09 March 1976, p. 48.

¹⁷⁷ Daniel Marcus, ‘Public Television And Public Access In The US’, in Hilmes, 2003, p. 56.

who supported and influenced commercial television through their advertising budgets.’¹⁷⁸ Giant corporations such as Exxon, Xerox, Mobil and GM, consequently, were glad to gain ‘quality by association’¹⁷⁹ by sponsoring programmes that were perceived as high-culture products. Elected United States president in the late 1960s, Richard Nixon was never a big supporter of public television, allegedly regarding it as a ‘bastion of East Coast liberalism and critics of his administration’¹⁸⁰ and thus vetoing budgets in order to pressure PBS to shy away from more political type of programming. Due to such pressures American public television arguably abandoned its initial tendency for controversial public affairs and issue-oriented programming, focusing instead on ‘high-toned cultural programming and imports from Britain, both of which appealed to increasingly important corporate contributions to the system.’¹⁸¹

There are nonetheless similarities in ethos between the US and the UK service, and most importantly a commitment to high quality programming. As Steemers argues,

PBS was influenced by British public service broadcasting, and similarities in ethos combined with a lack of funding to produce its own fiction opened up opportunities for the BBC’s “prestige” period drama.¹⁸²

More than that, British drama – in particular classical literature adaptations – emphasised PBS’s commitment to quality and educational *raison d’être*. In fact, having WGBH – its main network – located in Boston, on the grounds of the Harvard Business School, contributed to its image as a venue for quality programming, as did the local tradition of respect for British cultural values by the city’s elites.¹⁸³ PBS has always been known for its commitment to quality, and for attempting to differentiate itself from commercial broadcasters with taglines such as ‘TV worth watching’ and ‘If PBS doesn’t do it, who will?’¹⁸⁴ Henry Becton, WGBH’s president during the 1990s, was one of the network’s main advocates for quality, making it rather clear during an interview: “We want to have programmes that have longer life, more

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Giddings and Selby, 2001, p. x.

¹⁸⁰ Marcus, 2003, p. 56.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Steemers, 2004, p. 110.

¹⁸³ Laurence A. Jarvik, *Masterpiece Theatre And The Politics of Quality* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 1999), p. 14.

¹⁸⁴ Jarvik, 1999, p. 11.

relevance in an educational setting, to differentiate them from disposable television. Disposable television is not what we do.”¹⁸⁵

With commercial pressures to be yet accentuated by the election of Thatcher, the BBC could do with extra money to go on producing the high quality type of drama it was expected to produce. Reasons rather similar to the ones impelling PBS to buy – and later on to invest in – programming it could not afford to produce. In fact, as will be demonstrated later on, quality was an important consideration to all the players involved in the making of *Masterpiece Theatre*: PBS, WGBH, BBC and corporate underwriter Mobil (between 1971 and 2004), which saw in this scenario a great opportunity to improve its image as a patron of culture. Nevertheless, it is not the purpose of this chapter to either define quality television or to investigate the meanings of quality established by *Masterpiece Theatre* as a cultural product, a task that is rather well accomplished by Laurence Jarvik’s book on the topic.

This chapter’s mentioning of quality is intended to, firstly, highlight the alleged commonalities amongst the parts involved, and secondly, underline the fact that British heritage tends to be associated with high cultural capital and non-Hollywood values in America. While writing for *The Listener*, renowned critic and academic Raymond Williams mentions *Masterpiece Theatre* after a conversation with fellow scholars in America:

...the intellectuals told me (as they do everywhere but in Britain), ‘we don’t watch television’. Yet they did... The most admired programme, which would even empty parties, is called *Masterpiece Theatre* and turned out to be a selection of BBC2 classic serials.¹⁸⁶

Despite Williams’ surprise to discover that the only TV show American intellectuals would watch – and publicly admit that they did – was in fact an anthology of British TV drama, such a warm reception by opinion leaders was part of the American partners’ strategy. Affordable quality programmes which reflected British heritage and were associated with highbrow culture were exactly what American television was lacking at the time – even though such ‘Britishness’ could be, to some extent, only a ‘mirage created for the international audience.’¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Robert DiGiacomo, ‘Mass. Appeal’, *Emmy*, December 1997, p. 31.

¹⁸⁶ Raymond Williams, 1989, quoted in Jarvik, 1999, p. 4.

¹⁸⁷ Barbara Selznick, *Global Television: Co-Producing Culture* (Philadelphia, Temple University, 2008), p. 81.

4.3. The case of *Masterpiece Theatre*: selling Britishness to America

In search of low cost yet high quality material (a rather tricky equation when one considers production costs in the US) to appeal to its selected college-educated audiences, it did not take long for PBS to realise that on the other side of the Atlantic, the BBC, and later ITV, were able to supply, for reasonable prices, the kind of programming that was commonly regarded in America as high culture – yet not necessarily controversial.

The BBC's 26-part adaptation of John Galsworthy's novels, *The Forsyte Saga*, is commonly noted as responsible for opening up the American market for future deals with Britain.¹⁸⁸ It is appropriate to point out that, although cited as a co-production with MGM by some authors,¹⁸⁹ the serial was not in fact a collaboration project from the start. The production got held up in lingering negotiations with the studio, owner of the rights to most of Galsworthy's novels since the 1930s. Thus, in order to get a green light, the BBC had to arrange a US distribution agreement with the American studio, which accounts for the MGM co-production credits.¹⁹⁰ *The Forsyte Saga* was the last BBC drama ever produced in black and white and, at a cost of £250,000, it was the BBC's most expensive drama produced to date. After the domestic success of the drama serial, the potential of Britishness (or of the representations of highbrow British heritage) for attracting quality upscale audiences seems to have caught the attention of American executives.¹⁹¹ The series, which portrayed the fortunes of an aristocratic family between the years of 1879 and 1926, was thus purchased by the National Educational Television (NET), with the Ford Foundation financing the deal, and aired in the US in October 1969. Jeffrey Miller even argues the programme had such a strong influence on American television that shows such as *Roots* and *Dallas* owe part of their family-based serialised format to it.¹⁹²

Amongst the executives truly impressed with the popularity of *The Forsyte Saga* in America was WGBH's CEO, Stanford Calderwood, a marketing executive with prior experience in buying television shows for Polaroid sponsorship. According to Stewart, the recently hired executive made a 'cold call' on the BBC during a visit to London in 1970 to

¹⁸⁸ See Kanner (1986), Jarvik (1999), Stewart (1999) and Miller (2000).

¹⁸⁹ Selznick, 2008, p. 79.

¹⁹⁰ Sergio Angelini, 'The Forsyte Saga', *Screen Online*, BFI website, <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/1071033/index.html>.

¹⁹¹ In one of his first letters to Calderwood proposing a partnership for the production of *War And Peace*, Sutton writes on the first paragraph: '(...) this serial will come from the same stable that produced *The Forsyte Saga*'. Shaun Sutton, letter to Stanford Calderwood, 17 July 1970.

¹⁹² Jeffrey Miller, *Something Completely Different: British Television And American Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2000), p. 167.

discuss the possibility of buying some of the Corporation's already made programmes.¹⁹³ With both Time-Life Films (which owned the US rights to BBC material) and PBS approval, the next step was finding an underwriter. According to the *New York* magazine, when Herb Schmertz, Mobil Oil's marketing man, first got a call from Calderwood asking what he thought about *The Forsyte Saga*, he lied and said it was one of his favourite shows, although in truth he had never watched the BBC serial; he simply 'wanted to appear highbrow.'¹⁹⁴

The key issue here seems to be, beyond a fondness for British drama, a question of opportunity; the PR man immediately saw in *Masterpiece Theatre* the potential that other company executives previously approached by Calderwood did not see. The anecdote about Schmertz wanting to 'appear highbrow' seems rather revealing, as it contains, in its essence, the driving force of Mobil's PR strategy: cultural capital by association (a topic that will be further explored in a later section of this chapter). Mobil Oil (at present ExxonMobil) thus came on board. WGBH's programming manager Michael Rice, executive producer Christopher Sarson and PBS's vice-president of programming Sam Holt, joined Calderwood in London for a screening session of BBC material in that same year. The idea was to select "the cream of the crop of BBC drama", capitalising on the idea that "all English television is terrific."¹⁹⁵ As a result, Time-Life Films sold hours of BBC programming to WGBH, with Mobil putting up the money as the series' underwriter.

Masterpiece Theatre premiered in America on 10 January 1971 with *The First Churchills*, a decision mostly based on the fact that it starred Susan Hampshire, whom the Americans knew from *The Forsyte Saga*;¹⁹⁶ that first season also included ten other serials, including *The Six Wives Of Henry VIII* and *Elizabeth R.*, all of them previously produced by the BBC and sold off-the-shelf. In fact the first two seasons aired exclusively BBC material (see Appendix for a list of the first 20 seasons of *Masterpiece Theatre*). Seeing that the central idea of *Masterpiece Theatre* was to function as a weekly showcase for British quality drama, worries over the BBC's ability to constitute a truly prolific supplier of quality material to fulfil 52 Sunday nights began to rise at WGBH.¹⁹⁷ In his book on the history of PBS, David Stewart calls attention to a memorandum from Rice to Calderwood, soon after the London screenings,

¹⁹³ David Stewart, 'How Should Public TV Follow Up *The Forsyte Saga* Success?', *Current*, 14 April 1997.

¹⁹⁴ Bernice Kanner, 'Oil Slick: Mobil's Herb Schmertz Is The Lord Of P.R.', *New York Magazine*, 31 March 1986, p. 49.

¹⁹⁵ Christopher Sarson, quoted in Nancy P. McMillan, 'A 10th Birthday For *Masterpiece Theater*' [sic], *The New York Times*, 21 September 1980, p. 35.

¹⁹⁶ McMillan, 21 September 1980, p. 35.

¹⁹⁷ David Stewart, *The PBS Companion: A History Of Public Television* (New York: TV Books, 1999), p. 66.

which read: ‘Obviously our backlog for a second season will be much weaker unless the BBC produces some great new shows in the meantime.’¹⁹⁸ Worries about the quality, for American audiences’ tastes at least, of some of those BBC-produced programmes were not restricted to US executives: presenter Alistair Cooke himself only signed a one-year contract as ‘he thought *The First Churchills* was so bad that the series would never have a second season.’¹⁹⁹ A later comment by Holt seems to corroborate and sum up the key concern rising at the time: ‘What we discovered is that we could exhaust the BBC.’²⁰⁰

Such concerns would affect the decision over the series’ own name, as well as justify the entrance of ITV as a new player later on. Stewart points out that in 1970 Sarson even brainstormed a list of possible ideas for the series’ title, which included *Masterpiece Theatre* on the top, followed by other options such as *The Best Of The BBC* and *This Week’s Episode*.²⁰¹ Had the final choice been *The Best Of The BBC*, the American executives would definitely have had reasons to be apprehensive over supply. Another possible consequence is that such concern could have motivated WGBH and Mobil to start injecting money into British productions in order to harvest as much quality drama as possible, instead of just waiting to buy them off the shelf.

Therefore, when LWT’s *Upstairs, Downstairs* was presented to the *Masterpiece Theatre*’s team in America, it was seen as a sort of light at the end of tunnel: it had a broader appeal and it was, after all, still British. According to an article in the *New York Times*, however, not everyone in the team was pleased; Sarson thought it overly resembled a soap opera and thus would not be worthy of *Masterpiece Theatre*. But Rawleigh Warner Jr., Mobil’s Chairman then, apparently had ‘been touted on the series by the Duchess of Bedford during a London dinner party,’²⁰² and Schmertz did everything in his power to make sure the series was acquired; even if that meant negotiating directly with British producers and creating thus some awkwardness between partners Mobil and WGBH.²⁰³ From then onwards, the ITV companies also began to make deals with the US, bringing change to the scenario as they were, according to Jarvik, Grantham, and Bhegani, less strict than the BBC when it came to sharing editorial control,²⁰⁴ as well as capable of offering lower prices²⁰⁵. In the end, *Upstairs*

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Eaton, 2010.

²⁰⁰ Stewart, 1999, p. 66.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² McMillan, 21 September 1980, p. 35.

²⁰³ See Stewart (1999, p. 77) and Jarvik, (1999, p. 113).

²⁰⁴ See Bill Grantham, ‘Marriages Of Convenience’, *Stills*, February-March 1984, p. 38; Bhegani (02 September 1983, p. 18); and Jarvik (1999, p. 121).

Downstairs went on to be a success amongst the American viewers and critics, winning seven Emmys for *Masterpiece Theatre* (during its run from 1973 to 1977 on the anthology series).

According to a number of historical accounts,²⁰⁶ Mobil's voice was much stronger than it would be expected from an average corporate underwriter, especially when it came to selecting material and negotiating with British producers. Both Jarvik and the *New York* magazine imply that, after WGBH had shown little interest in the ITV series, Schmertz virtually bullied the network into buying it, announcing that Mobil was going to buy the show anyway.²⁰⁷ 'In the end, WGBH gave in to the money man,'²⁰⁸ said the article. Stewart, in turn, is more neutral in his historical account; having sat in many of the meetings as a CPB executive, he states that although Schmertz's presence during screenings 'represented the sort of corporate influence critics of public broadcasting have always feared', he had not met anyone in public broadcasting who would confirm that the 'decisions were made by anyone except the executives of WGBH.'²⁰⁹ Nonetheless, one can argue that the conflict over the acquisition of *Upstairs, Downstairs* was the end result of the fears over shortages in BBC material, and the purchase of the LWT show was a turning point in the history of *Masterpiece Theatre* and in the relationship between the companies involved. From then on, notes Jarvik, 'Mobil would deal directly with ITV companies to assure a steady supply of programs suitable for its series.'²¹⁰ By its third season, *Masterpiece Theatre* had become a blend of BBC and ITV productions (in fact its eleventh season was entirely composed of non-BBC productions), and by its eighteenth season Channel Four had also become a programme supplier. Stewart also recalls that Mobil gradually lost interest over finished material, giving preference to programmes in pre-production stage, which would, theoretically, give the oil company better chances to have a say over production aspects. Even though pre-sales hypothetically do not entail editorial contributions by the purchaser, and even though the BBC is well known for its unwillingness to share creative control, one could make a case that US money was beginning to speak louder, as Mobil's or Time-Life's green light could determine the future of a project. By that time, Schmertz (Fig. 5) began to be referred to not only as the

²⁰⁵ Scott, 27 March 1974, p. 2.

²⁰⁶ See Kanner (1986), Stewart (1999) and Jarvik (1999).

²⁰⁷ Kanner, 31 March 1986, p. 50.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Stewart, 1999, pp. 72-73.

²¹⁰ Jarvik, 1999, p. 158.

‘the most powerful and successful corporate-public-relations man in the world,’²¹¹ but also as ‘the most powerful man in English television.’²¹²



Fig. 5: Herb Schmetz poses for a photo session during an interview to the *New York Magazine* in 1986. The caption reads: ‘A world-class art-patron’. (Kanner, 1986, p. 49.)

With American companies gradually getting a bigger voice in what was, and was not, being produced for British television, it is not surprising that conflicts of interest would arise. In the United Kingdom, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA)²¹³ guidelines regarding sponsorship for commercial television stated at the time that: “‘the funder must not influence the editorial content of a programme, nor may the appearance be given, whether by reason of the funder’s commercial activities or otherwise, that such influence has been exerted.’”²¹⁴ Despite that, through its direct relationship with WGBH, Mobil required approval of script, cast, and personnel,²¹⁵ and Time-Life Films, as will be shown later, demanded choices of cast and content more relevant to American audiences. What is more, British producers were becoming gradually dependent on US money, which, despite being

²¹¹ Kanner, 31 March 1986, p. 47.

²¹² Jarvik, 1999, p. 118.

²¹³ IBA was the supervising body at the time. In 1990 the Broadcasting Act replaced it with the Independent Television Commission (ITC), which ceased to exist in December 2003. The new communications sector regulator since then is Ofcom, the Office of Communications. For more see <http://www.ofcom.org.uk>.

²¹⁴ ‘A User’s Guide To Television Sponsorship For Programmes On ITV, Channel 4, BSB’, London: IBA, 1988, quoted in Jarvik, 1999, p. 118.

²¹⁵ Jarvik, 1999, p. 118.

rather welcome due to the growing inflation and budget cuts at the BBC, obviously came at a price.

4.3.1. Capitalising on quality

Mobil's investment in *Masterpiece Theatre* went from US\$ 400,000 in the first season to ten times that amount ten years later. "That amount has increased tenfold over 10 years, to US\$ 4 million, plus some US\$ 2.5 million for promotion this year [1980]. We're very happy with it,"²¹⁶ declared Schmertz in an interview. More importantly, such investment on the series meant that, in order to guarantee sufficient material to fill in the weekly schedules, Mobil would be willing to pump money into programmes as early as the pre-production stage. Ultimately, therefore, sales of off-the-shelf drama to PBS – via Time-Life Films – developed into pre-sales of projects already in progress, and finally led to co-productions – to be broadcast under the *Masterpiece Theatre* strand and financed by Mobil.

With the help of New York publicists Frank and Arlene Goodman, the series was heavily promoted in the US during its first decade. Frank Goodman has in fact claimed his campaign for *Masterpiece Theatre* changed the way the British broadcasting industry – rather amateurish in his opinion – conducted public relations: "We even taught the English. (...) *Masterpiece Theatre* convinced the BBC and a lot of other people how to promote a show in England."²¹⁷ Arlene Goodman also recalls:

'You used to go to the BBC on a show that they had done that was coming up on *Masterpiece Theatre* and say, "So, where are all the bios? Where are the press cuttings? Where are the reviews?" And all you would get would be something like oaktag in colors and it had one picture, and the cast – sometimes. Sometimes not.'²¹⁸

Moreover, the fact that those dramas were not being presented as single programmes, but indeed as plays²¹⁹ within a wider concept, had an important role in the success and longevity of *Masterpiece Theatre*. These programmes were selected on account of their Britishness, watched weekly as part of an anthology series presented by a quintessentially British host and accompanied by a grandiose classical music piece – a sum of ingredients which made the series, at least in the eyes of American audiences, typically British and erudite. 'The people

²¹⁶ McMillan, 21 September 1980, p. 35.

²¹⁷ Frank Goodman, 06 June 1988, quoted in Jarvik, 1999, p. 153.

²¹⁸ Arlene Goodman, 06 June 1988, quoted in Jarvik, 1999, p. 153

²¹⁹ The episodes were in fact referred to as 'plays' by host Alistair Cooke. Knox, 2012, p. 37.

who started *Masterpiece Theatre* realised that “anglophilia” was not a dirty word,²²⁰ declared Rebecca Eaton in 2010. Being *Masterpiece Theatre*’s corporate underwriter, Mobil would obviously also benefit from such image associations, as put by Schmertz himself:

‘It’s not the shows that are important. It’s exploiting it with the American public that’s important. I don’t care whether anybody watches the shows. I want them to feel socially pressured so they have to lie and say they watch the shows. It’s the cartoons in the *New Yorker* and all the ancillary stuff that are important.’²²¹

Such comment seems to unequivocally show Schmertz’s ingenious businessmanship. Aware of the highbrow aura and prestige of a publication such as the *New Yorker*, he even hired its esteemed and awarded cartoonist, Charles Saxon,²²² to create a promotional poster for *Masterpiece Theatre* in 1978 – a strategy in fact employed by a number of large corporations such as IBM and Xerox at the time. The poster featured a taxi-driver refusing to take a passenger: ‘*Sorry lady – it’s time for Masterpiece Theatre*’ (Fig. 6). It clearly illustrates how Mobil wanted to be regarded: as an art-conscious benefactor bringing culture to American citizens of any social sphere, but especially those aspiring to be seen as having higher cultural capital; a fact heightened by the solemn voice-over accompanying the opening credits of every programme: ‘*Masterpiece Theatre* is made possible by a grant from Mobil Oil Corporation’. Mobil’s marketing team was deliberately trying to capitalise on the series to improve the company’s image at a time when the increase in gas prices began to soil the reputation of the major oil companies. Underwriting *Masterpiece Theatre* was thus part of a wider and long-lasting public relations campaign, one that led PBS to be dubbed ‘Petroleum Broadcasting Service’²²³ (as other oil companies began to follow Mobil’s steps and invest in public television). If the BBC was benefiting from the investment and overseas distribution, Mobil was certainly benefiting from the association with highbrow culture.

Masterpiece Theatre weekly posters, created by acclaimed graphic design company Chermayeff and Geismar,²²⁴ became very popular in the US – some are even considered collectors’ items.²²⁵ Usually sized 76 cm x 117 cm, the posters featured the title of each programme – starting with ‘Masterpiece Theatre presents’, followed by the channel, day and

²²⁰ Eaton, 2010.

²²¹ Herb Schmertz, 1991, quoted in Jarvik, 1999, p. 165.

²²² Responsible for a total of 92 covers and 700 cartoons at the *New Yorker*.

²²³ Kanner, 31 March 1986, p. 50.

²²⁴ Simone Knox, ‘*Masterpiece Theatre* And British Drama Imports On US Television: Discourses Of Tension’, *Critical Studies In Television*, Volume 7, No 1 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 36.

²²⁵ See Stewart (1999, p. 73) and Mobil Corporation (1991, p. 11).

time of its broadcast. However, the only companies referred to on such posters were PBS and Mobil (the latter with its logo highlighted in bold and in a different colour); no mention is made of the BBC, ITV, or the British production companies that had originated the particular programme (Fig. 7).

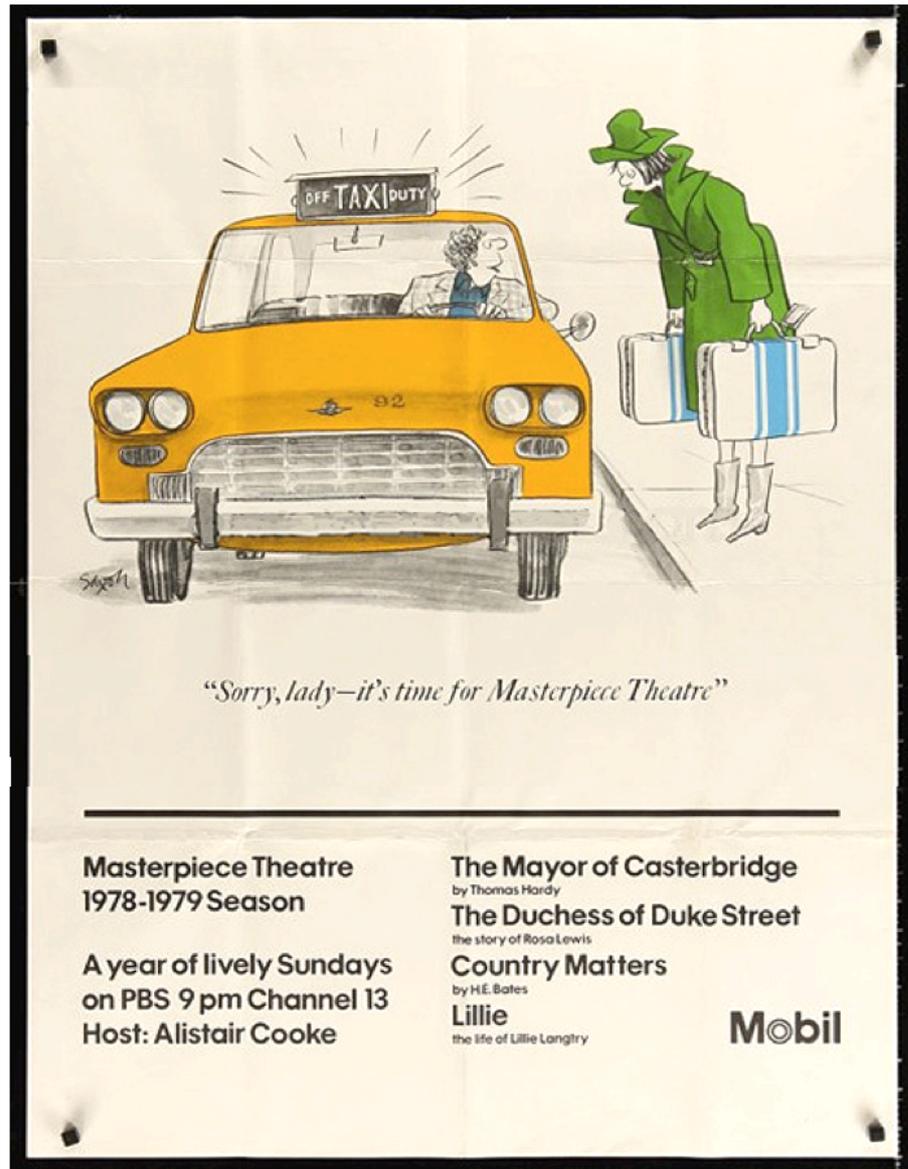


Fig. 6: Mobil’s promotional poster for *Masterpiece Theatre*, 1978.



Fig. 7: *Masterpiece Theatre* posters for two BBC co-produced dramas.

With its foreword written by Mobil's Chairman Allen E. Murray, the glossy hardback *Mobil Masterpiece Theatre 1971-1991* also lacks any mention of British programme-makers. In fact, the executive's message of gratitude for the series' twenty-year anniversary goes essentially to WGBH, to host Alistair Cooke and to the American viewers:

Much of the credit for this enduring quality of *Masterpiece Theatre* must go to WGBH, Boston's public television station, which, from the beginning, has selected and packaged the programmes for broadcasting. And, certainly, special thanks go to Alistair Cooke, the series' urbane and inimitable host.²²⁶

Except for the production credits on the episode listing section, there is no mention of the BBC or the ITV companies in the commemorative book. Edited by Mobil, it also includes introductions written *New Yorker's* Brendan Gill and by *Upstairs, Downstairs* creator Jean

²²⁶ *Twenty Seasons Of Mobil Masterpiece Theatre 1971-1991* (Wilmington, Massachusetts: Mobil Corporation, 1991), p. 7.

Marsh; throughout the British actress' two-page memoirs, no mention of LWT can be found, with the exception of the name of a single producer.

The matter of production acknowledgements on *Masterpiece Theatre* is also brought up by Briggs; although the historian does not go into details, he does comment on *Masterpiece Theatre*'s opening – and closing – credits: 'With Union Jack-bedecked opening titles, it nonetheless had the British credits removed by WGBH in Boston, which happily took the credit for itself.'²²⁷ Briggs seems to imply that the use of the Union Jack in the opening credits, the British spelling of the word 'theatre' and the presence of erudite host Alistair Cooke guaranteed enough high-culture symbolism to the series, without the need for disclosure of the actual British producer – be it the BBC or any of the ITV companies.

No indication could be found that the BBC had ever contested being omitted from programme credits. Given the criticisms that its association with American companies – even if indirectly – had already spawned in British territory, it would certainly not be so advantageous for the Corporation having its logo printed alongside a major oil company.

4.3.2. The role of Time-Life Films

Although the BBC is precluded from receiving outside money from sponsors, as established by Clause 12 of its Licence, in the case of co-productions it is permitted to accept outside contributions in exchange of distribution or broadcasting rights, with profits shared after recovery of the distributor's investment and costs.²²⁸ In such cases, corporate sponsorship is permitted as long as the connection to such a company is not apparent when the programme is broadcast in the United Kingdom.²²⁹ As the minute from the Programme Management Board meeting in March 1971 recommends,

while the BBC should not enter into agreements directly with sponsors, it should not be precluded (as a matter of principle) from arranging co-productions with broadcasters, producers or distributors, even though it might be known that funds might be provided by a sponsor.²³⁰

The deals with America were thus made in such a way that the pressure would come not exclusively from WGBH or Mobil, but also from distributor Time-Life Films. A division of

²²⁷ Briggs, 1995, p. 713.

²²⁸ Scott, 11 March 1976, p. 5.

²²⁹ Jarvik, 1999, p. 117.

²³⁰ Attenborough, 02 March 1971, p. 3.

Time Inc., it acted as the middleman between the BBC and the American companies, providing the money to co-finance programmes it judged ‘acceptable’ to American taste, and then selling those to reputable broadcasters such as WGBH (or any other PBS station). The station on its turn would sell the sponsorship of those programmes to companies such as Mobil Oil; for this reason one cannot find connections between the BBC and Mobil in the written record.²³¹ Schmertz would in fact describe his company in a *New York* magazine interview as “‘the father of the bride: WGBH makes the decisions and sends us the bills’”. Such neutrality does not appear to convince the journalist, who carries on about the case of *Upstairs, Downstairs* and argues the executive ‘has more sway than he lets on.’²³²

Wynn Nathan, vice president of syndication for Time-Life Films (who later became president of Lionheart Television International Inc.), declared in 1976 that his company’s investments in BBC programmes, something in the order of US\$ 1 million a year, were proving rather lucrative.²³³ Time-Life’s president Bruce Paisner, however, did not seem to share his colleague’s positive opinion; in a paper sent to the BBC executives in 1974, titled *Strategy Paper On The Relationship Between The BBC And Time-Life Films*, Paisner expressed his concerns over BBC output and the American market, complaining about a backlog of programmes that were proving to be ‘unsaleable’:

There is simply a ceiling to the amount of programming this country’s television will accept from any single source, particularly a foreign one. (...) About one-third of the co-productions on which we have already taken delivery fall into this ‘virtually unsaleable’ category. The rest are probably saleable, but not at a high enough price to recoup our investment. (...) We cannot make many new co-production investments until we have dealt with our current inventory (...).²³⁴

Apparently a shortage of BBC material was not the real problem, but a shortage of material appealing enough for American taste. Thus, in order to ‘avoid problems and misunderstandings in the future, and to be sure we know what we are buying before we commit’, Paisner proposed a guide for Time-Life’s acceptance or rejection of co-production opportunities from then onwards. The first item listed was: ‘Choose subjects which are inherently interesting to the US audiences’, followed by ‘Lean toward marquee names known

²³¹ Although it is possible to find at the BBC Written Archives some correspondence with PBS/WGBH and a few memos and agreements with Time-Life, no direct connection with Mobil can be found.

²³² Kanner, 31 March 1986, p. 50.

²³³ Brown, 09 March 1976, p. 48.

²³⁴ Paisner, 12 March 1974.

in the US.²³⁵ Unsurprisingly, Paisner's suggestions caused strong reactions at the BBC; a few days later Aubrey Singer, then Head of Features Group, wrote to all concerned departments with noticeable irritation:

Paisner wilfully refuses to understand in any way whatsoever that we, the BBC, cannot embark on the lowering of standards implicit in 'MidAtlantic' production. Time and time again he has been told (and obviously it has not sunk in) that our programmes are designed for British audiences, that the majority of the money in co-productions is British licence holders' money, that the editorial thrust must therefore be aimed at the British audience and not between both audiences.²³⁶

Weeks later, Scott, then Controller of BBC2, prepared and circulated a document to all departments involved with Time-Life. His intention was to provide background information on the BBC deals with Time-Life and to clarify the BBC's general policy towards co-production deals. The document states: 'We produce for our own public – which pays. (...) No amount of success in the USA can compensate for loss of British support – or infringement of our Charter or betrayal of our own standards.'²³⁷ The seven-page document also reveals some initial fears over the possible threat ITV could represent for the BBC's relationship with American PBS:

(...) it has been distressing to have to tell our friends and colleagues at Public Broadcasting that we were not the price-fixers. PBS in the circumstances has stayed remarkably friendly – but their loyalty is beginning to fray under the effect of rival British productions like *Upstairs, Downstairs* and *Country Matters* from ITV, offered at lower prices and without the association of a Time-Life Films co-production tag.²³⁸

As indicated by Jarvik, the agreement covering the future of *Masterpiece Theatre* was approved by all parties (Time-Life Films, BBC, WGBH, CPB and Mobil) in June 1971. Such agreement, forwarded to Mobil, gave WGBH the right to add new American titles to BBC programmes as well as 'power to censor BBC programs.'²³⁹ Jarvik quotes parts of the contract, which according to him gave "the right to cut or edit any BBC program WGBH may deem necessary or desirable to achieve American public broadcasting standards."²⁴⁰

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Aubrey Singer, memo to the BBC Television team, 22 March 1974.

²³⁷ Scott, 27 March 1974, p. 5.

²³⁸ Scott, 27 March 1974, p. 2.

²³⁹ The original copy of this specific document could not be found at the BBC Written Archives; therefore this source remains secondary. Thaddeus Holt, 1971, quoted in Jarvik, 1999, p. 111.

²⁴⁰ Letter from Thaddeus Holt to Frank Marshall, 23 June 1971, quoted in Jarvik, 1999, p. 110.

The whole experience with Time-Life and WGBH in early 1970s helped to reinforce BBC's scepticism about sharing editorial control with overseas partners. It seems that the key lesson learned from early co-production deals was that there should be a limit to the amount of interference granted to overseas partners. Such suspicion can in fact be found in internal documents dating from as early as 1970; in a memo to Assistant Controller Joanna Spicer, Sutton recognises that, although co-productions were rather attractive in concept, in practice co-partners demands tended to increase. 'Script approval, participation in casting, the inclusion of their own actors, their own directors, slow whittling away of the artistic control that is essential to the BBC.'²⁴¹ Another passage on Sutton's memo clearly conveys the mood at the time: '(...) the aim of an American co-partner is not to bring himself up to European standards, but to bring us down to his.'²⁴²

4.4. Beyond *Masterpiece Theatre* and beyond Time-Life Films

Despite the BBC's dealings with numerous American co-production partners (including 20th Century Fox Television, Paramount Television, Warner Brothers Television and Showtime), the partnership with Time-Life stands out due to the duration and the large number of co-productions it generated. In fact, a large number of Time-Life co-productions were not made for *Masterpiece Theatre*, but were nonetheless broadcast on PBS (see Appendix for a complete list of programmes).

One of those co-productions was *War And Peace*, an extremely ambitious 20-episode miniseries featuring Anthony Hopkins in his first major role before a massive audience.²⁴³ At the time it was considered a major production, with a cost of about £790,000 - from which 15 per cent was covered by Time-Life Films and 5 per cent covered by Yugoslavia Films Belgrade,²⁴⁴ all in exchange of rights. The epic in fact only got off the ground due to co-production funding, as is mentioned in a paper on co-productions written some years later,

On our own we would probably have shot it on location in Scotland (and prayed for snow). With Time-Life's co-finance it was possible to shoot it in Yugoslavia and to make use of a large part of the Yugoslav Army.²⁴⁵

²⁴¹ Shaun Sutton, memo to Joanna Spicer, 19 August 1970.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ The drama was on for over three months in Britain (first on BBC2 and then on BBC1), and after that on PBS.

²⁴⁴ 'War And Peace Proposed Agreement With Time-Life Films Inc. And Belgrade Television', 1971.

²⁴⁵ Wilkinson, 27 June 1979, p. 2.

Amongst the projects co-produced with Warner Bros Television is the 1974 drama serial *Notorious Woman*; and amongst those not aired under the *Masterpiece Theatre* strand is *Tender Is The Night* (BBC/Showtime), in 1985. There is, unfortunately, very little material available about those programmes at the BBC Written Archives, and the following is the only data recovered for this research.

Collins *et al.* observed in their analysis of the economics of UK television that by the 1980s the BBC had in fact gradually changed its traditional approach in regards to high-budget drama co-productions. They mention the case of *Tender Is The Night*, where the American partner Showtime arguably played a significant part both financially and creatively. The authors explain that such change in the BBC's negotiating style was due to happen, as there had been a growing resistance to its controlling approach by some foreign television companies.²⁴⁶ From their point of view, the Corporation's once rather strict policy on international interference was slowly beginning to give in to American pressure. In fact, an article later published in *Broadcast* confirmed their argument; entitled 'BBC eases joint project control', it announced – without concealing the author's near disbelief – that 'a less intransigent BBC' was

considering a major shift in its approach to co-production that should allow creative control to be shared on a limited number of drama projects.²⁴⁷

The word 'considering' should not be taken lightly, as it adds a certain degree of vagueness that can be rather useful to both – the magazine and the BBC – in case the claim proves to be inaccurate or not carried on. Executive producer Jonathan Powell – later to become Head of Drama (1985-87) and BBC1 Controller (1987-92) – had a different point of view regarding the alleged new control policies. In a personal interview, he declared that *Tender Is The Night* was a very specific case, a rather atypical co-production, since the BBC was not the main partner and thus had less editorial control than usual.

That was completely different, because they were putting over half of the money, and they really did want to insist on their casting and stuff like that. We had some terrible battles on that programme. (...) We had a real argument about the lead actor.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ Richard Collins, Nicholas Garnham and Gareth Locksley, *The Economics Of Television: The UK Case* (London: Sage Publications, 1988), p. 69.

²⁴⁷ Basil Comely, 'BBC Eases Joint Project Control', *Broadcast*, 21 February 1986, p. 3.

²⁴⁸ Powell, 17 September 2007.

As for the BBC/Warner Brothers drama co-production *Notorious Woman*, although the material available is rather scarce, there is a sequence of interesting correspondence between British and American partners, including a letter from Michael Peacock (Warner Brothers) to Pieter Rogers (BBC producer) stating he was not happy with the ending of the final episode and thus suggesting a few cuts and a faster-paced editing.²⁴⁹ Such suggestions did not seem to be well received by the serial writer, Harry W. Junkin, who sent a very upset letter to the BBC a few days later:

Why suddenly we have so many cooks stirring the script broth over the last few pages of Ep 07 is totally baffling. (...) Surely Mr Peacock underestimates both [actors] Rosemary and James Coussins when he suggests the Flaubert scene is too long. A scene lasting 15 seconds is too long if it is badly acted.²⁵⁰

Fearing more postponements,²⁵¹ or even worse, the cancellation of the serial, Rogers chose not to do anything that could risk losing Warner Bros backing; that included not sending Junkin's angry letter to the American partner. Instead, in a rather diplomatic move, he wrote a note to Junkin:

Let me have a little think, dear friend, and re-draft it and send it to you to look at. What you say is inescapable, but it might prove somewhat unpalatable in our present circumstances when we really need Warner's support.²⁵²

Such degree of diplomacy and level-headedness, it seems, did not carry on into the next decade. When asked by *The Times* in 1985 about the reasons the BBC would not produce a serial 'as good as *The Jewel In The Crown*', Powell retorted with striking self-confidence: "A corporation which can offer *Bleak House*, *Edge Of Darkness* and *Tender Is The Night* need not concern itself with such comparisons."²⁵³ Perhaps due to its similarly self-congratulatory tone, the newspaper advertisement for *Tender Is The Night* (a six-part Dennis Potter adaptation co-produced with American channel Showtime) received a witty reproach by *The Guardian*'s Peter Fiddick. After the 1985 full-page ad, featuring the tagline 'An

²⁴⁹ Michael Peacock, letter to Pieter Rogers, 02 June 1974.

²⁵⁰ Harry W. Junkin, letter to Pieter Rogers, 19 June 1974.

²⁵¹ It seems that a PA strike and other unforeseen events were already causing delays and some serious financial strain on that production.

²⁵² Pieter Rogers, letter to Harry W. Junkin, 25 June 1974.

²⁵³ Peter Lennon, 'Snap, Crackle And Pop Behind The BBC's Serials', *The Times*, 20 September 1985.

advertisement for the BBC, written by some of its sternest critics²⁵⁴ set alongside various positive quotations from British television critics was run, the journalist asked the same critics to evaluate the ad itself. Amongst the published replies were Nancy Banks-Smith's (*The Guardian*) and Herbert Kretzmer's (*Daily Mail*). The following are extracts from their responses:

'This was a nasty swipe at Granada who, after *The Jewel In The Crown*, were described as the best TV company in the world. Though not, as it happens, by themselves.'²⁵⁵

'As if eager to snatch back the laurels won by Granada's *Brideshead* and *Jewel In The Crown*, Auntie has been pre-selling its Fitzgerald saga with an avalanche of full-page advertisements remarkable for their air of trite self-congratulation...'²⁵⁶

4.5. Enterprises: a new strategy for a new decade

When BBC Enterprises was initially established in 1972, it was expected, as indicated by Briggs, to be a gradual source of income, a wholly owned commercial subsidiary of the BBC.²⁵⁷ In his point of view, the move indicated the BBC was attempting to become more competitive, even if only via a sister company – in a similar way that BBC1 allowed itself to become more populist after the creation of BBC2. As Enterprises became Limited in 1979 – coincidence or not, the same year Thatcher's reign started – it seemed to confirm for many critics that the Corporation was attempting to become more profitable. It could be said that such a move marks the beginning of a period in British broadcasting branded as the 'era of availability' by Ellis (much similar to Epstein *et al.*'s concept of the 'TV II era'); a period where there were more choices of channels (Channel Four would start in 1982), more choices of programmes and thus more competition, especially with the advent of new technologies such as satellite, cable and videocassette recorders.

Amongst a number of internal policy and organisational changes at the time, there was the centralisation of all co-production affairs by the previously created Co-Productions Business Department, as well as the appointment of a Head of Commercial Operations for Enterprises in New York. As the Co-Productions Business Department was intended for handling politics, policies and relating to producing partners, Enterprises was from then on expected to handle

²⁵⁴ Petter Fiddick, 'Advertising The BBC', *The Guardian*, 30 September 1985.

²⁵⁵ Nancy Banks-Smith, 1985 quoted on Fiddick, 1985.

²⁵⁶ Herbert Kretzmer, 1985, quoted on Fiddick, 1985.

²⁵⁷ Briggs, 1995, p. 713.

overseas distribution of programmes,²⁵⁸ as well as all kinds of ancillary products like videos (an infant yet promising market at the time), records, books and magazines. In fact the Corporation's growing interest in such products could be considered another indicator of the arrival of the TV II era.²⁵⁹ Moreover, Enterprises would from then on be able to act as an occasional co-financing partner for BBC Television. As stated in *BBC And Co-Production* (a paper to the General Advisory Council), the creation of BBC Enterprises Ltd would guarantee an alternative of finance available

if the funds of co-producers should decline, or their editorial demands ever become unacceptable. (...) These new arrangements are already enabling us to do away with the need for co-production partners in many other major strands of programming.²⁶⁰

The paper claims co-productions carry an intrinsic danger of undermining the BBC's business potential: 'Every time we give away foreign rights in return for money "up-front", we take away from BBC Enterprises Ltd. the opportunity to make foreign sales and profits.'²⁶¹ By the tone of *The BBC And Co-Production*, the organisation seemed more determined to boost its business potential, albeit in a slightly reticent step towards the so-called 'touch of the Grades'. To some extent, the paper's final paragraph reflects the more business-oriented mind-set present at the BBC at that time, and for being very elucidating it will be fully reproduced below.

The Future [emphasis in original]

It is still – and will probably remain – necessary for the Television Service to seek co-financing partners from overseas for major drama and documentary series. We are by no means alone in this: most European broadcasting organisations find it necessary, as do public television stations in the United States. Owning an independent profit-making sales company, however, gives us an advantage we must continue to exploit. The more rights we retain, the higher will be the BBC Enterprises Ltd.'s turnover, the more money will be available to the BBC to enhance budgets, and the less will be the need for co-producers from overseas. This must be the strategy in the years ahead.

So far as we do co-produce with foreign organisations, we will continue to observe the same ground rules. We will retain final artistic and editorial control. We will only co-produce with organisations connected with broadcasting (and not with commercial companies outside the world of broadcasting).

²⁵⁸ Huw Wheldon, *Creativity And Collaboration In Television Programmes* (London: Doubleday, 1974).

²⁵⁹ See Epstein *et al.*, 2002.

²⁶⁰ Wilkinson, 27 June 1979, p. 4.

²⁶¹ Wilkinson, 27 June 1979, p. 5.

Many of our programmes will continue to end up (on public television in the United States, for example) in commercially sponsored slots. That is all right with us because we have no relationship with the sponsors, but only with the broadcasting organisation or distributor with whom we have our co-production contract. Above all, we will continue to scrutinise each deal with great thoroughness to ensure that it is truly in the BBC's interests – immediate and long-term.

We would ask members of the General Advisory Council to consider co-productions in the context of their limited impact on the whole spectrum of programme-making. Moreover, the BBC's hope is that its recent changes in policy will further insulate the Television Service from any over-dependence on an outside organisation.²⁶²

Thus, it looks as if 1979 was marked by two major game-changers: firstly, the arrival of Margaret Thatcher at number 10, with an entire new agenda for public services in Britain; secondly, the BBC's timid yet fundamental step towards becoming a more business-oriented organisation, with Enterprises acting as its independent profit-making arm. This was a step that, nevertheless, called for an explicitly worded report which, as per the sample above, was determined to reassure the General Advisors Council on four key points: one, we will always retain artistic and editorial control; two, we will never have a direct relationship with sponsors (e.g. Mobil); three, the turnover from Enterprises will prove extremely beneficial for our programme-making in Britain; and four, other public broadcasters are doing the same after all.

As one of the main advantages brought by Enterprises going limited would be an alleged freedom from outside distributors, there was some astonishment in the industry when in June of that same year Time-Life's contract was renewed. As an article published in *Broadcast* mentions, there had been suggestions that the long – yet not always trouble-free – relationship between the BBC and Time-Life was getting close to an end, since the Corporation had not been 'wildly happy with Time-Life's performance.'²⁶³ Additionally, there was a belief that the BBC programmes were not being pushed as hard as they could be, and that Time-Life's rake off was exorbitantly high.²⁶⁴ The contract's extension was, thus, interpreted by the press as nothing more than a diplomatic move. Yet only two years later a new company was formed: Lionheart Television International Inc., which later became BBC Lionheart Television (Fig. 8 and 9). Initially run by former Time-Life senior executives, Lionheart was co-owned by Western-World Television (49 per cent), Public Media Inc. (49 per cent) and BBC Enterprises

²⁶² Wilkinson, 27 June 1979, p. 6.

²⁶³ 'BBC Renews Time-Life Contract', *Broadcast*, 11 June 1979, p. 5.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

(2 per cent),²⁶⁵ taking over the North-American distribution of BBC output and acting as a co-producer, as it did in the case of the drama serials *Mansfield Park* (1983) and *Edge Of Darkness* (1995). As there is very little information available about this venture from official sources (the BBC Written Archives Centre's coverage is limited to 1979 and none of the executives interviewed for this research were able to provide more details), it remains difficult to conclude whether Lionheart was in fact a lucrative partnership or a positive experience for the BBC, although it did last for approximately a decade.



Fig 8: (left) Early 1990s signature accompanied by the tagline 'THE BBC IN AMERICA'; (right) a later one, with the animated line 'A BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION' appearing from the bottom of the screen. These closing credits can be found in old VHS copies of *Doctor Who*, *Are You Being Served?* and *Fawlty Towers* released in the North-American market.

²⁶⁵ 'Lionheart Television International Inc', *BroadWcast Online Guide*, no date, http://gallifreybase.com/w/index.php/United_States--1981.

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Fig. 9: Lionheart Television International Inc, print ad, 1981.

4.6. Conclusion

In search of high quality fare for its erudite audiences in the early 1970s, American public television found in the BBC (and later the commercial companies) the ideal supplier of high-culture yet non-controversial television drama. After the success of *The Forsyte Saga* in the US, British television's potential to attract upscale audiences was noticed by PBS executives. For a small fraction of what it would take to produce them domestically, and with an underwriter of the magnitude of Mobil Oil, PBS (mainly through its Boston network WGBH) fathered an anthology series that at the time changed the face of US television and had a decisive effect on Britain's television industry. *Masterpiece Theatre* began showcasing off-

the-shelf dramas that had previously been broadcast in the UK; however, due to the high demand created, soon programmes began to be made-to-order in England, as American partners increasingly injected money to get projects off the ground. Indeed, it was only a matter of time before the sales of off-the-shelf material would develop into pre-sales of projects and later co-productions. The benefits of co-producing seemed clear: as the BBC – and later the commercial companies – proved not to be able to meet the intense demand of programming necessary to fill a weekly slot at PBS, the presence of an American underwriter became indispensable. From the financial underwriter’s point of view, another alleged advantage of this arrangement would be the embedded right to have a say on what was to be produced (and how it would be produced). With *Masterpiece Theatre* – described in America as a ‘civilized club for the cultured television viewer’²⁶⁶ – PBS’s brand image became so associated with British culture that it was dubbed ‘Purely British Stuff’²⁶⁷ by American television critics.

Based on the internal documents found, BBC executives were aware of the scepticism that such large degrees of international collaboration would generate at the time. Given that the BBC is expected to be more committed to national identity than a commercial broadcaster, and the licence fee paid by British citizens is supposed to keep it independent of commercial pressures, having to also cater for audience appetites on the other side of the Atlantic was, after all, rather paradoxical. The number of meetings, papers and reports deliberating over the subject of co-production seems to illustrate how the decision-making staff was conscious that, on one hand, to justify the licence fee, it needed to maintain its commitment to British audiences; on the other, to justify those helpful dollars, it needed to minimise programmes’ cultural discount by making the final product a little more palatable to the American audiences. Even a special press pack was created to clarify the main points of concern, in what looked like an attempt to contain the growing criticisms – particularly aggravated by the fact that *Masterpiece Theatre*’s sole underwriter happened to be a giant oil company. In that sense, avoiding stirring up trouble at home, it seems, was more important than being properly credited overseas.

As the Corporation appeared to be slowly coming to terms with the somewhat ‘un-Reithian’ notion of being more profitable (clearly demonstrated by the creation of an official commercial arm), it also appeared to be unsure of how to convince British citizens – and its

²⁶⁶ Jarvik, 1999, p. 10

²⁶⁷ Chris Blackhurst, ‘Is Auntie Selling Her Soul?’, *The Independent*, 21 September 1997, p. 20.

own General Advisors Council – that its public service ethos would remain unaltered. Like the 1950s programme buyers, often quizzed about the increasing amount of US imports on British small screens, many 1970s producers were questioned about the increasing amount of American funding being pumped into BBC programmes. If by the early 1970s the BBC still regarded co-productions with a certain suspicion, by the mid-1980s – and especially throughout the 1990s – co-production deals progressively became a necessity. Without the support of advertising or sponsorship to fund programming, and with escalating political and market demands, the need to secure co-production deals became critical, as will be demonstrated in the following chapter.

5. CHAPTER FOUR: Funding drama in the late 1980s and the 1990s

‘(...) no programme maker can afford to think parochially these days.’²⁶⁸

This chapter will present an historical overview of the television landscape in Britain between the late 1980s and the 1990s, a time during which the BBC suffered even more pressure to be profitable and show results. This was a period, more than any other to that point, marked by an increasing tension between culture and strategy at the BBC; as market research, ratings and overseas sales grew in importance under John Birt’s command, the BBC was more than ever looking outside its once parochial strategies.

With limited circulation on network television, the presence of British drama in America was, until then, confined mostly to public television. However, as cable channel Arts and Entertainment Network (A&E) began to show interest in BBC programmes, a new trade opportunity was created. A&E became of the BBC’s major American partners at the time, helping to produce a large number of period dramas - including *Pride And Prejudice* (1995), one of the most successful and beloved drama serials to this day at the BBC. Arriving at a moment when broadcasters around the globe were increasingly aware of the value of marketing and branding, *Pride And Prejudice* proved to be a game changer. As will be argued, it not only confirmed the enormous potential of period drama in both national and international markets, but it also helped to set new standards for quality, production values and marketing at the BBC.

5.1. A new multi-channel environment

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Thatcher years were politically and economically challenging, particularly for the BBC. With the government questioning the Corporation’s own continuance and with the new multichannel environment beginning to take shape, the pressures on the Corporation were not likely to lessen. Additionally, the global broadcasting landscape was undergoing major changes: between 1980 and 1992 the number of television sets tripled worldwide, reaching 1 billion, and the number of satellite TV stations went from a

²⁶⁸ Towler, 12 July 1990, p. 20.

handful to about 300.²⁶⁹ Moreover, during that same period, the number of television channels in what would become the European Union moved from 40 to 150, with over 50 of them delivered by satellite.²⁷⁰ By this time, a powerful multinational commercial media sector had already developed and caused a shift in the balance of power between public service and commercial organisations. In the words of Küng-Shankleman,

the market sovereignty, even the very existence of public service broadcasters (...) was called into question. PSBs found themselves battling for viewers and funding, forcing in turn a rethink of both their mission and their *modus operandi*.²⁷¹

In Britain, the terrestrial channel scenario would also see its first new addition since Channel Four in 1982, with the launch of the fifth terrestrial channel in 1997. The cable and satellite markets – which were still in their infancy during the mid-1980s – were by the end of the decade an established part of the media landscape. With Sky launching its satellite services in 1989, followed by BSB in April 1990, the cable market had about 10 per cent of total viewing.²⁷² As per cable penetration, it practically doubled between 1986 and 1993, from 12 per cent to 21 per cent of TV homes.²⁷³ The number of households with satellite dishes went from 2.5 million in 1991 to 3 million in 1993, and almost 3.5 million by 1995. Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, the US broadcasting industry saw not only the rise of cable systems by the late 1980s, but also the strengthening of the Fox network and the growing popularity of the VCR – all contributing to diminishing channel loyalty, shortened attention span²⁷⁴ and the ‘volatile and confusing state of the television industry’²⁷⁵ at the time. Into the 1990s, those new American cable stations were, according to scholar Megan Mullen, already ‘operating at a profit, receiving widespread carriage, and selling time to major advertisers;’²⁷⁶ as a result, cable outlets would have more disposable cash to invest in original – and often co-produced – programming.

²⁶⁹ Segrave, 1998, p. 213.

²⁷⁰ Segrave, 1998, p. 213.

²⁷¹ Küng-Shankleman, 2000, p. 24.

²⁷² Simon Blanchard, ‘The Wrong Type Of Television: New Labour, British Broadcasting And The Rise And Fall Of An Exports Problem’, in Sylvia Harvey (Ed.), *Trading Culture: Global Traffic And Local Cultures In Film And Television* (Eastleigh, UK: John Libbey Publishing, 2006), p. 35.

²⁷³ Nelson, 1997, p. 60.

²⁷⁴ Grant Tinker quoted in Jane Feuer, Jane, Paul Kerr and Tise Vahimagi (Ed.), *MTM Quality Television* (London: BFI, 1984), p. 80.

²⁷⁵ Selznick, 2008, p. 85.

²⁷⁶ Megan Mullen, *The Rise Of Cable Programming In The United States* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), p. 182.

Another important variable that went through radical changes at the time were production costs. Sutton notes that, whereas during the period between 1952 and 1972 production costs were ‘bizarrely low’, by the early 1980s the budget for an entire drama series or single play ‘was round about the £100,000 mark,’²⁷⁷ a figure which, if compared with the 1990s average budget (£400,000 per hour)²⁷⁸ or the 2000s (£540,000 per hour)²⁷⁹ seems even more bizarre. As put by the executive, from late 1980s on there was no room for cheap television drama any longer; instead, there were only three types: ‘expensive, very expensive and “My God, you must be joking!”’²⁸⁰ As both production costs and competition increased, chasing after extra non-licence fee revenue became crucial for the Corporation.

Additionally, there was a growing demand in the UK – brought by the new satellite venues – for American programming, and a growing focus on international sales on both sides of the Atlantic. In fact, with US audiences on their way to become the UK’s number one overseas consumers (just a decade later the US would answer for nearly 43 per cent of the overseas sales of British television programmes),²⁸¹ catering for their tastes would become an ever-growing concern for any producer hoping to break into the international market. As author Michael Tracey notes in *The Decline And Fall Of Public Service Broadcasting*, it seemed clear that ‘commerce as an idea of how to fund the BBC had by the late 1980s become a legitimate and increasingly important part of its financial strategy.’²⁸²

Once more the pressure was coming not only from the market but also from the government. Under John Major’s government, the Department of National Heritage (DNH, which later became the DCMS) maintained Thatcher’s policy of ‘holding down the BBC’s licence fee’.²⁸³ In 1999 the partly government-funded study *Building A Global Audience* concluded that the British television industry was underperforming, and that the rejection coming from international buyers had to do with the fact that Britain was producing the ‘wrong type’²⁸⁴ of television (this and other reports on British media performance will be discussed in the next chapter).

²⁷⁷ Sutton, 1982, p.141.

²⁷⁸ Towler, 12 July 1990, p. 20.

²⁷⁹ Jane Tranter quoted in Poz Hulls, ‘The Drama Question’, *Televisual*, April 2006, p. 33.

²⁸⁰ Sutton, 1982, p.141.

²⁸¹ Steemers, 2004, p. 44.

²⁸² Michael Tracey, *The Decline And Fall Of Public Service Broadcasting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 115.

²⁸³ Blanchard, 2006, p. 37.

²⁸⁴ Blanchard, 2006, p. 38.

5.2. Accountants, consultants and marketers: a change of culture at the BBC

Tracey calls attention to the fact that one of the major indications of the ‘ways in which the financial wind was blowing’ in 1987 was the appointment of Michael Checkland, an actual accountant, as Director-General at the BBC. In Tracey’s view, it implied a transformation of its organisational character, symptomatic of a crisis through which many public service broadcasters in Europe were experimenting at the time. ‘Co-production, co-financing, implicit and explicit sponsorship, new services, foreign sales, the whole lexicon of commerce invaded the Corporation’, he points out.²⁸⁵ Giddings and Selby make a similar assessment of the circumstances, as they declare that the Corporation needed ‘to accommodate far more of an accountant’s perceptions to the quality of its broadcasting.’²⁸⁶ The times when the public broadcaster had the luxury of operating its Reithian doctrine with ‘an almost god-like indifference to the mundane matters’²⁸⁷ were seemingly over.

As the 1990s arrived, the ‘financial wind’ had blown even further, carrying in not only accountants but also marketing specialists and efficiency consultants (such as the renowned American firm McKinsey). In Jamie Medhurst’s view, the period in fact saw an increased ‘standardisation of programming whereby the differences between the BBC and ITV were becoming less prominent.’²⁸⁸ According to Born’s detailed account of the BBC’s changing process at that time,

a cultural change began to crystallise, answering the long-standing taunt that the BBC was constitutionally uncommercial. A new seduction, a collective hallucination, imperceptibly took hold: the notion that even BBC producers could play the market, could join in an indie, could pitch and sell...²⁸⁹

To her, such entrepreneurialship and managerialism also created constant rivalry between departments, which in her view ended up undermining the Corporation's capacity to be inventive, as a large amount of energy was wasted on ‘internal battles and bureaucratic solutions’²⁹⁰ instead of being channelled to more artistic or creative endeavours. As new skills were required, staff training also grew in significance; Born even mentions closed sessions (to which the researcher was not allowed in) with the purpose of teaching drama department heads how to pitch ideas in commissioning meetings. Pitching ideas efficiently was an

²⁸⁵ Tracey, 1998, p. 115.

²⁸⁶ Giddings and Selby, 2001, p. 118.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Medhurst, 2003, p. 42.

²⁸⁹ Born, 2004, p. 173.

²⁹⁰ Born, 2004, p. 177.

‘increasingly critical skill in the marketised BBC’²⁹¹ – and a particularly handy one when dealing with potential American buyers, it could be added. In addition to sending top executives to elite American business schools and running a dedicated MBA for managers in association with the University of Bradford,²⁹² the Corporation also began to hold at the time special in-house lectures where producers new to the demands of co-production were ‘made aware of the criteria according to which programmes were more or less likely to succeed in securing a deal.’²⁹³ Those so-called ‘educational events’ functioned as eye openers for some producers who began to become increasingly aware that the simple mention of the word ‘co-production’ during a commissioning meeting was sometimes more than enough to get a controller’s interest in a more ambitious project.²⁹⁴

Therefore, under John Birt’s administration there was a noticeable growth in importance of managerial tools and processes such as research, branding and marketing. Being the dominant player in a previously protected national sphere, such business aspects were not seen as a major priority at the BBC, and thus treated with suspicion and even disdain by some of the staff. During her interviews with staff members, Küng-Shankleman noticed that, whenever the topic of ‘marketing’ was mentioned, one specific metaphor would frequently crop up: ‘blowing one’s own trumpet’ – an idiom which she interpreted as intrinsically negative, with connotations of commercialism and bad form.²⁹⁵ Initially seen as mere temporary managerial fads, the actual seriousness of the marketing and branding push became clear as internal documents issued by the television directorate began to circulate, decreeing the 1996-7 marketing plan should drive all promotion, publicity and public relations activities.²⁹⁶

For marketing scholars Philip Kotler, Veronica Wong, John Saunders and Gary Armstrong, a brand is much more than just a name or a symbol for a product or service, it in fact represents the ‘consumer’s perceptions and feelings about a product and its performance – everything that the product or service *means* to consumers.’²⁹⁷ It is with that premise in mind that brand strategist Iain Ellwood argues that, as consumers, we tend to choose brands that we perceive as having the values that are relevant to us and to our personality – real or desired – and which will help to ‘build us into who we are or wish to be and communicate this

²⁹¹ Born, 2004, p. 212.

²⁹² Born, 2004, p. 215.

²⁹³ Born, 2004, p. 166.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Küng-Shankleman, 2000, p. 177.

²⁹⁶ Born, 2004, p. 258.

²⁹⁷ Philip Kotler, Veronica Wong, John Saunders and Gary Armstrong, *Principles Of Marketing* (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2005), p. 555.

to others.²⁹⁸ Robert Bellamy and Paul Traudt go even further, and claim that the value of branding ‘is more important in television than in many other businesses’; being such an ephemeral and non-tangible product, they believe that ‘awareness and image essentially are all television has to “sell” to the viewing audience.’²⁹⁹

One could argue, then, that those were in fact the foundations for the BBC’s 1996-7 marketing plan, which recommended the following: that the branding strategy should consistently signal ‘value to licence fee payers’, by communicating a unified and ‘defining “vision” of how we wish to be perceived.’³⁰⁰ It even included, according to Born, a list of ideal brand perceptions for both BBC1 and BBC2. While values such as accessible, innovative, intelligent and stylish were deemed central for both brands, BBC1 was more generally branded ‘*Our BBC*’, and the ideal values to which it should be associated were entertaining, engaging, trustworthy, authoritative, contemporary, warm and elegant. Meanwhile, BBC 2 – home of more specialist and minority interest programmes – was branded ‘*My BBC*’, and its recommended values were topical, playful, diverse, modern, challenging, surprising and able to take risks.³⁰¹

If, in fact, Ellwood is correct and consumers do choose brands they perceive as having values that are relevant to them and which they wish to communicate to others as part of their own personalities, then the proposed list of ‘ideal brand perceptions’ were quite in sync with the values British audiences (or any audience) would expect from their public television service. However, as Born calls attention to, there is always the risk that a brand will ‘fail to live up to the vision’ as reality kicks in; and as she believes it was the case with the BBC, a ‘disjuncture existed between image and output.’³⁰² In other words, Born believes that a discrepancy existed between the ambitious marketing vision for the BBC and what the BBC was actually able to deliver – or in fact wanted to deliver, considering the staff’s lukewarm reception to change. Once again the Corporation was confronted with an almost Hamletian ambivalence, as the dilemma of whether to be or not to be commercial, whom to serve – British or international audiences – and whom to trust – newly arrived marketers or long serving producers – seemed to be at the centre of every major decision.

²⁹⁸ Iain Ellwood, *The Essential Brand Book: Over 100 Techniques To Increase Brand Value* (London: Kogan Page, 2000), p. 68.

²⁹⁹ Robert Bellamy and Paul Traudt, ‘Television Branding As Promotion’, in Susan Eastman, *Research In Media Promotion* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000), p. 135.

³⁰⁰ BBC Network Television Marketing Plan, 1996-7, quoted in Born, 2004, p. 259.

³⁰¹ Born, 2004, p. 259.

³⁰² Born, 2004, p. 267.

Thus, as the market transitioned from the TV II era (1975-1995, also known as the age of niche marketing) to the TV III era (1995-present, the age of television branding),³⁰³ there existed a consensus that branding had ‘a crucial part to play in distinguishing the BBC from its competitors, providing a basic unity and diversity, and reinforcing the perception of the BBC as reliable and trustworthy.’³⁰⁴ Not surprisingly, ‘trustworthy’ was even one of the listed ‘ideal brand perceptions’ recommended in the marketing plan. Born does call attention to the fact that some of the staff believed ‘the more trust is marketed, the less substantial it seems;’³⁰⁵ consequently, there were worries that the audience would not necessarily trust the ‘trust’ advertised by branding. There was an internal fear that those brand values would be perceived as a lie, as not authentic enough. An apparent ‘danger of *artificiality* [italics in original]’³⁰⁶ which seems to go hand in hand with the aforementioned ‘bad form’ of blowing one’s own horn.

Another clear sign of the escalating importance of marketing and branding were the changes in organisational configurations, as the best location – and the new order of precedence – for the newly ascendant disciplines were tried out by the Corporation. While Birt’s vision was seen by many as a threat to the traditional values and internal politics, change advocates saw it as the best way to improve the BBC’s performance, both nationally and internationally, by transforming its deep-rooted culture and forcing an originally ‘introverted and narcissistic organisation to look outside itself.’³⁰⁷ But the real challenge for the BBC was beyond an inability to look ‘outside itself’, it was accepting the need to enter such ‘bad form’ – and nearly un-British – game of ‘blowing one’s own horn;’ in other words, being as inevitably ordinary as any other broadcaster who recognises the need to dance to a more commercial tune. With that in mind, there is some irony in the fact that while Americans tried to sell ‘Britishness’ to their audiences, the BBC was trying to sell ‘Americanness’ to its internal public – and not entirely succeeding at first. By 1995 the Corporation would step even further away from its originally ‘introverted self’, with the launching of BBC Worldwide; one year later this single organisation took home £354 million by way of programme sales,³⁰⁸ and by 1998 about £75 million of the BBC’s £2 billion budget came from

³⁰³ As Epstein *et al.* have not thus far updated their 2002 article, television historian Amanda Lotz (2007), has proposed a fourth television era to describe the present period of media convergence and multi-platforms, dubbing it the ‘post-network era’.

³⁰⁴ Born, 2004, p. 266.

³⁰⁵ Born, 2004, p.268.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Born, 2004, p. 255-6.

³⁰⁸ Giddings and Selby, 2001, p. 82.

its commercial ventures.³⁰⁹ The sale of rights became, hence, the main source of the BBC's income after the licence fee; and although BBC Worldwide was created to 'maximise the value of the BBC's assets for the benefit of the licence-fee payer', with its profits being 'reinvested into the BBC's licence fee-funded programming,'³¹⁰ such commercial success did not take place without the usual criticisms.

The same could be applied to the launching of BBC America, a cable channel to offer British programmes to US viewers; established in partnership with Discovery Communications Inc., BBC America was intended to help the BBC 'to become the world's leading global broadcaster.'³¹¹ The venture was received with the usual scepticism; critic Tom Buerkle argues that the Corporation was again 'overstepping its role as a public television company' by risking to 'lower its standards in a drive for dollars.'³¹² According to him, British commercial broadcasters even complained at the time to a House of Commons special committee on television regulation, claiming that the BBC was in fact 'abusing its public-service role', since it already had 95 per cent of its funding secured via the license paid by British citizens.³¹³

Plater's suggested 'touch of the Grades' was finally becoming a reality, as the Corporation began to incorporate some of the commercial aggressiveness once considered so 'un-Reithian' for the public broadcaster. As pointed out by Born, by the mid-1990s the government was concerned of the poor balance of trade in television, thus issuing a call for British producers to increase television exports and grow as global businesses. For the BBC, without the benefit of advertising and sponsorship funding, the need to secure co-production deals to subsidise programmes became paramount. In fact, according to Charles Denton – who during his time as Head of Drama oversaw the adaptation of *Pride And Prejudice* – by 1996 nearly 90 per cent of the programmes needed some kind of underwriting.³¹⁴ In Born's own words, 'without co-production or co-financing, certain genres such as drama serial and single films would simply no longer have been made.'³¹⁵ With that in mind, the BBC is in that case more likely to be 'held hostage' by overseas funding than the commercial channels, as these have the

³⁰⁹ Tom Buerkle, 'BBC Heads Out (With A Guide) To New Frontier: TV In America', *International Herald Tribune*, 20 March 1998, <http://www.iht.com/articles/1998/03/20/bbc.t.php>.

³¹⁰ Steemers, 2004, p. 82.

³¹¹ Buerkle, 20 March 1998.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Charles Denton quoted in Born, 2004, p. 166.

³¹⁵ Born, 2004, p.165.

alternative of advertising funding. At the same time, as Rixon points out, to keep on charging the licence fee, the BBC had to

show that it was not acting as a commercial broadcaster, but was offering a diverse range of quality domestic programmes. It was meant to be the cornerstone of British broadcasting, and not a commercial channel constantly seeking high ratings.³¹⁶

Thus, while in one sphere there was pressure to become more profitable, in the other there was pressure to maintain its public broadcaster standards. In this context – and considering that its commercial activities are somewhat limited within the United Kingdom – concentrating on overseas markets and on the adaptation of classics, so well received worldwide, seemed a logical solution.

All those changes would however come at a price: on top of the internal conflicts and the usual outside criticisms, the BBC also had to deal with the dissatisfaction of some of its own talent over the directions being taken. For instance, Denton resigned in 1996 from his post claiming, according to *The Independent*, that ‘the “Orwellian” regime under John Birt had undermined his ability to make good programmes.’³¹⁷ Other key staff also quit that same year, including Liz Forgan, Managing Director of BBC Radio, David Liddiment, Head of Light Entertainment, and Nick Elliott, Head of Drama Series. A few years later so did Michael Wearing, after serving nearly a decade as Head of Drama and delivering some of the most acclaimed drama at the BBC. A vociferous critic of the regime headed by Birt, according to *Variety* the executive left ‘in disgust’, claiming that the ““rampant commercialism”” had made it ““creatively impossible”” for him to remain³¹⁸ at the Corporation. According to the trade journal, the last straw came when his idea to adapt a novel by Janet Neel was rejected after it received some negative feedback from a U.S.-style focus group.

5.3. WGBH loses power; enter A&E

By its tenth anniversary, the essence of *Masterpiece Theatre* – i.e. ‘the best of British TV drama’ – remained the same, as did its illustrious presenter Alistair Cooke. Despite that, the show went through minor changes, such as shorter series and the inclusion of more contemporary dramas. By the mid-1980s the title changed to *Mobil Masterpiece Theatre*, and

³¹⁶ Rixon, 2006, p. 52.

³¹⁷ Paul Field, 'Shock Waves Set To Hit Radio Of Quality', *The Independent*, 08 June 1996, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/shock-waves-set-to-hit-quality-of-radio-1335913.html>.

³¹⁸ Adam Dawtrey, 'Patience Wearing Thin At BBC', *Variety*, 09 February 1998, <http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117467517.html?categoryid=18&cs=1>.

later on to *ExxonMobil Masterpiece Theatre*. During those first ten years, it brought WGBH not only consistent ratings but also critical acclaim and prestige, along with a collection of 20 Emmy Awards and 43 nominations – all of which the American public network collected as ‘producer’. This was a rather good outcome considering that the cost of importing or co-financing British programmes was at the time a small fraction of what it would take to produce such dramas domestically. Joan Wilson (aka Joan Sullivan), executive producer of *Masterpiece Theatre* from 1973 to 1985, declared in an interview that although WGBH’s initial intention was to ‘spawn a home-grown production company that would provide programming equal in quality to the BBC dramas’, the promise remained unfulfilled and ‘unlikely to become reality in the near future.’³¹⁹ Yet Wilson, who took over from Sarson, is credited for having created, through *Masterpiece Theatre*, ‘what American middlebrows have been seeking since the advent of the medium: TV without guilt’, as reported in the *New York Times*.³²⁰

The amount of funding contributed by WGBH was never too large, as confirmed by BBC’s Wearing. He argues that it was just enough to alleviate the costs of producing such a highly expensive genre as costume drama: ‘It wasn’t a large amount of money. It just helped.’³²¹ In fact, by the mid-1980s American public television was struggling to cope with ‘the twin onslaughts of renewed political pressure by Republican administrations’, which repeatedly threatened to end federal funding, as well as with the multiplication of cable networks, which explicitly poached PBS formats. According to Marcus, losing ground to new players was more than a financial issue for PBS; it rather revealed a crisis of confidence, leading the American public broadcaster to lose ‘both viewers and social impact.’³²² As cable channels began to use British material to fill gaps in their schedules at low costs (just like PBS had done in previous years), they began to scoop up most of the BBC’s drama shows, securing exclusive first-look agreements; supported by advertising money, they evidently had higher budgets to invest.

Additionally, cable channels began to increasingly focus on strengthening their own brands, thus relying much more on original and co-produced programming than on simple acquisitions.³²³ On top of that, a certain resistance to overseas programming by US audiences,

³¹⁹ McMillan, 21 September 1980, p. 35.

³²⁰ ‘*Masterpiece Theater* [sic]: Television Without Guilt’, letter to the editor, *The New York Times*, 10 February 1991, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/02/10/arts/1-masterpiece-theater-television-without-guilt-473391.html>.

³²¹ Wearing, interview, London, 08 October 2007.

³²² Marcus, 2003, p. 56.

³²³ John Hazelton, ‘Bought In The USA’, *Television Business International*, 2002, p. 41.

although always present, started to play a bigger part. Steemers argues that, while PBS was always happy to use programmes that were recognisably British, those channels seeking to define their own brand and appeal to a very specific and lucrative target audience were much less accommodating;³²⁴ a newly configured scenario which certainly increased the appeal of co-productions. Indeed, in co-productions there is room, theoretically, for negotiation and adjustments that might guarantee a better acceptance of cultural differences by a foreign audience; the type of adjustment which cannot be made when a programme is bought off-the-shelf. As argued earlier, Hoskins *et al.* claim that international collaborations can help to minimise the cultural discount that usually happens when a cultural product such as a television show crosses national borders.³²⁵ Therefore, at a time when cable channels were seeking to fortify and differentiate their brands, international co-production seemed a rather reasonable alternative to buying finished programmes, one that had more chance to be better tolerated by American audiences.

One of the most important cable outlets for British drama in America at the time was the Arts and Entertainment Network. Founded in 1984, it started as a joint venture of three major media conglomerates: Hearst Corporation (37.5 per cent), Walt Disney Company (37.5 per cent) and NBC Universal (25 per cent). In its first year, two thirds of the channel's programming came from the BBC; two years later, the amount remained high: 40 per cent of the programming was purchased off-the-shelf from the British public broadcaster.³²⁶ The partnership between the BBC and A&E strengthened even more by the early 1990s as, following the market trend, A&E recognised that the best way to guarantee a steady supply was through co-production deals; as Steemers points out, 'British programming fitted the bill, because it had reputation for "quality", and could therefore be used to attract more upscale and wealthier audiences.'³²⁷ With higher revenues³²⁸ and consequent larger contributions, the BBC found in A&E a more adequate co-production partner for the new environment. In Wearing's words: 'A&E were sort of the new kids in the block, and, more importantly, they

³²⁴ Steemers, 2004, p. 111.

³²⁵ Hoskins *et al.*, 2000.

³²⁶ Joan Giglione, 'Arts And Entertainment', in Horace Newcombe (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia Of Television*, Volume 2 (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2004), p. 144.

³²⁷ Steemers, 2004, p. 111.

³²⁸ A&E began to show a profit in 1987, whereas other cable channels (like RCA's Entertainment Channel and ABC's Arts Channel) targeted at similar advertiser-sought niches remained in the red. By 1997 it was present in more than 70 million homes in America and it was expected to bring in about US\$ 241 million in gross ad revenue. See Unger (1988).

had more money.’³²⁹ In fact, A&E’s contribution varied between 7 and 50 per cent of the programme’s budget;³³⁰ indeed, a larger contribution than previous partners.

The scenario would, however, change in 1997. While remaining an important vehicle for British finished programmes, especially period drama and murder mysteries, circumstances changed and so did the relationship between the BBC and A&E. In an article for *Broadcast* magazine titled ‘Discovery in, A&E out’, BBC’s deputy Director General Bob Phillis declared the Corporation’s long-lasting relationship with A&E would have to change, owing to the new venture with Discovery Communications Inc. According to the article, some of the areas to be covered by the Discovery joint-venture agreement were the launch of an entertainment channel in the US – BBC America – and the establishment of a distribution company and co-production entity.³³¹ BBC America was indeed launched one year later, designed to be a 24-hour cable network dedicated to British programming. It meant competition for A&E not only on the co-production front, but also – and most importantly – for the same type of well-educated American niche audiences. Without the restrictions faced by the BBC as a public broadcaster in Britain, the cable channel was entirely funded by advertising, and distributed in association with Discovery Networks (also responsible for handling advertising sales).

In that same year the American cable broadcaster rebranded itself as simply A&E, launching a lavish advertising campaign with the tagline ‘Time Well Spent’. According to Whitney Goit, A&E executive vice president for sales and marketing, the tagline defined ‘a comparison between those who view a lot of television as a wasteland, and their acknowledgment that there are good things on TV and that they’d like to watch more thought-provoking TV.’³³² The executive made it clear when asked by *Advertising Age* that the channels’ main target was in fact the ‘somewhat more affluent and somewhat better educated’³³³ niche audiences, whom the company planned to reach with ads in upscale publications such as *Architectural Digest*, *The New Yorker*, *Town & Country*, *Travel & Leisure* and *Vanity Fair*. From then on, A&E also sought new collaborative British partners: the number of co-productions with ITV increased, generating a number of projects such as

³²⁹ Wearing, 08 October 2007.

³³⁰ Steemers, 2004, p. 116.

³³¹ Lloyd Shepherd, ‘Discovery In, A&E Out At BBC’, *Broadcasting and Cable*, 14 July 1997, p. 18.

³³² Chuck Ross, ‘Cable Marketer Of The Year: A&E’, *Advertising Age*, 08 December 1997, <http://adage.com/article/news/cable-tv-marketer-year-a-e/69867>.

³³³ Ross, 08 December 1997.

Emma (1996), *Jane Eyre* (1997), *Tess Of the D'Urbervilles* (1998) and *Horatio Hornblower* (1999), all products of what Giddings and Selby call the 'Pride And Prejudice effect.'³³⁴

5.4. The case of *Pride And Prejudice*

Amongst A&E's top collaborations with Britain is the highly celebrated serial *Pride And Prejudice*, produced in 1995, in the midst of what was called 'Austenmania'³³⁵ (in that same year the theatrical releases of *Persuasion* and *Sense And Sensibility*, as well as *Clueless* and *Emma* in 1996, proved to be major critical and commercial successes). The novel – which had already been adapted by the BBC five times (1952, 1958, 1967, and 1985) and twice by Hollywood³³⁶ (1940 and 2005) – remains to this day one of the most beloved of Jane Austen's works, as well as one of the most popular love stories in British literature.³³⁷ 'But how do you turn a classic book into classic television?'³³⁸ asks the narrator in the 'making of' video. In fact, this specific adaptation, directed by Simon Langton and starring the now illustrious Colin Firth (Mr Darcy) and Jennifer Ehle (Elizabeth Bennet), has also become one of the most esteemed period dramas of all time, both in Britain and worldwide – although the fact that it is actually a co-production between the United Kingdom and the United States tends to remain ignored by most of the public.

Wearing explained the initial talks with both the producer and the screenwriter of the serial:

The great irony of *Pride And Prejudice* was that it actually was initially commissioned by ITV, then Andrew [Davies] got to episode three of it and they decided not to do it. Maybe they were daunted of the money (laughs) ... Sue [Birtwhistle] and Andrew then came to me and said: 'How would you like to do the best book in the world?' (...) The difficulty was that the BBC had only recently done a version of *Pride And Prejudice*, so it was a very peculiar situation, and I thought it was wrong to do that again soon. So I did a sort of deal with Andrew, I said the book I wanted to do was *Middlemarch* (...) It's a fantastic book that hadn't been done. (...) So I did this sort of devil's deal, I will do *Pride And Prejudice* when we've done *Middlemarch*. So he wrote it, we made it [BBC/WGBH, 1994], and that sort of kicked off the new run of big adaptations. It spawned a whole lot of them.³³⁹

The production costs for the serial were reported to be £6 million, with A&E contributing

³³⁴ Giddings and Selby, 2001, p. 124.

³³⁵ Selznick (2008, p. 89) and Kroll (17 December 1995).

³³⁶ Sue Parrill, 'Pride And Prejudice On A&E: Visions And Revisions', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, Vol. 27, Issue 2, 1999, p. 142.

³³⁷ 'The Big Read', *BBC website*, April 2003, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/bigread/top100.shtml>.

³³⁸ 'The Making Of *Pride And Prejudice*', 10th Anniversary Edition, DVD, BBC, 2005.

³³⁹ Wearing, interview, London, 08 October 2007.

£1.65 million for the right to show the programme in the North American market.³⁴⁰ At a cost of nearly one million pounds an episode, the final result was in fact sumptuous, with extremely high production values – especially if compared to previous productions. In the words of Giddings and Selby, the 1995 version of *Pride And Prejudice* looked ‘handsome, sexy, polished and moneyed.’³⁴¹ Therefore, in producing such a lavish piece, the BBC was making a statement, one that assured both the public and potential international investors that it still was – and it intended to remain – the number one reference for classic television drama. Parrill observes:

[*Pride And Prejudice*] filmmakers took advantage of a considerable budget to take the production out of doors and to give the viewer a sense of the physical world in which the story takes place.³⁴²

Considering that the 1990s were later described as the ‘renaissance of the classic serial,’³⁴³ it appears that the message got across; unsurprisingly the BBC co-produced three more sumptuous classic adaptations with A&E after that (see Appendix for the complete list). With the strong competition imposed by the ITV companies and their period dramas shot on 35 mm film, the BBC wanted to make a statement. And although shooting on film did escalate production costs, it was also a requirement for getting American dollars to boost the budget. As Wearing mentioned in his interview, had he continued to produce studio-bound videotaped drama, he surely ‘would not have got the money. Particularly from A&E. In American terms, it was absolutely essential that they were on film.’³⁴⁴

It was producer Sue Birtwhistle’s wish that *Pride And Prejudice* should appeal to a particular audience, specifically one with ‘time on their hands, money in their pockets, liberated sexuality and desires’. The serial producer saw that specific niche as one who wanted ‘a touch of the classics because they were classics, but also wanted them reduced into neat dollops of sweetness for easy consumption.’³⁴⁵ In order to catch that demographic’s attention, Birtwhistle believed the screenplay should therefore focus on two central aspects of the story: money and sex. ‘Andrew Davies and I would like to take you to lunch and sell you

³⁴⁰ Kevin Loader, ‘*Pride And Prejudice*: The Cost Of Dressing Up’, *Sight & Sound*, Special Supplement, September 1996, p. 21.

³⁴¹ Giddings and Selby, 2001, p. 104.

³⁴² Parrill, 1999, p. 143.

³⁴³ Giddings and Selby, 2001, p. 80.

³⁴⁴ Wearing, 08 October 2007.

³⁴⁵ See Giddings and Selby (2001, p. 122) and Moyes (1995, p. 7).

a six-part adaptation of simply the sexiest book ever written,³⁴⁶ said the producer in a phone conversation with Nick Elliott, at the time Head of Drama at LWT (to whom the idea of the serial was first proposed). Rumours of a spiced-up version of the classic eighteenth century novel soon reached the press, helping to generate conversation and heighten expectations around the serial. ‘Tabloid newspapers needed no further encouragement. SEX ROMP JANE AUSTEN [emphasis on original] hit the headlines,³⁴⁷ she declared later. Although the final product did not contain any sex scenes or full frontal nudity, as had been inaccurately rumoured by the press (or perhaps intentionally spread by the serial’s own producers), the 1995 version unquestionably had some ‘extra spice’ if compared to earlier ones. In Birtwhistle’s view, nevertheless, the eroticism had always been there, in the constantly present repression of desire, in the furtive glances across a crowded room, in the moment two people touch each other for the first time on the dance floor.

Be it due to the convenient ‘sex romp’ publicity or to the sheer quality of the production, this specific adaptation struck a chord not only with the younger audiences but also with a larger portion of the public, both in the United Kingdom and the United States. When it was screened by A&E in America, in a three-night two-hour run in 1996, it was ‘the most successful show they had screened in their 12-year history,³⁴⁸ with an average of 3.7 million homes tuning in to the show.³⁴⁹ Additionally, the drama was subsequently sold to eight different overseas broadcasters, generating more than £500,000 for the BBC.³⁵⁰ In Britain, where the serial was broadcast in the autumn of 1995, the success was immediate; according to Michael Kavanagh it had an average audience of 10 million people, with the last episode attracting 40 per cent of the television audience.³⁵¹

³⁴⁶ Birtwhistle and Susie Conklin, *The Making Of Pride And Prejudice* (London: Penguin Books/BBC Books, 1995), p. VI.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁸ Giddings and Selby, 2001, p. 196.

³⁴⁹ Selznick, 2008, p. 90.

³⁵⁰ Alexandra Frean, ‘BBC To Make Lavish New *Ivanhoe*’, *The Times*, 23 October 1995.

³⁵¹ Michael Kavanagh, ‘Is Costume Drama Going Out Of Style?’, *Electronic Media*, 19 January 1998, p. 86.



Fig. 10: BBC's VHS, DVD and Blu-Ray box sets. Contrary to A&E's editions, which put emphasis on Darcy's character, these versions display both protagonists in equal proportions. Darcy's hairstyle, however, seems to have been digitally manipulated on both later versions.

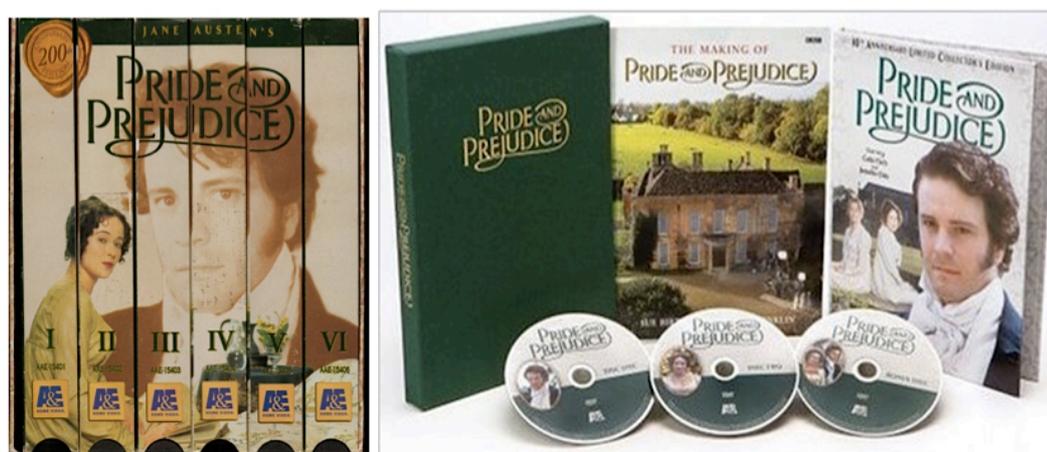


Fig. 11: A&E's VHS and 10th Anniversary Special Collector's set, which included a gold embossed green fabric slipcase (reinforcing the literary appeal), a *Biography* episode about Jane Austen, a documentary about the series and a 120-page companion book.

In November of the same year, the *Pride And Prejudice* VHS box set (Fig. 10 and 11) remained a best seller for months in the United Kingdom, even though it cost an average of £20, twice as much as the cost of a feature film. According to the BBC, it was unheard of for a video to sell even half as well, in particular because it was possible to tape the episodes at home for free.³⁵² Such was its impact that the main characters were absorbed by British pop

³⁵² Giddings and Selby, 2001, p. 123.

culture, and as put by Jojo Moyes in *The Independent*, it was not only adoring lovelorn women who were murmuring the name Darcy: so were marketing men.³⁵³ The famous “wet shirt scene”, as it has come to be known, has spawned across the years a number of parodies in literature (*Bridget Jones’s Diary*, 2001), TV (*Lost In Austen*, 2008) and film (*St. Trinian’s*, 2007), the latter being performed by Colin Firth himself. The serial was also referred to in the 1998 TV licence advertising campaign, which possibly verifies better than any other instance its status as a pop culture icon. As put by Giddings and Selby:

Elizabeth Bennet and Mr Darcy had been so completely absorbed into our popular culture that by August 1998 BBC Television was able to successfully use clips from the serial with suitably dubbed dialog as part of their advertising campaign for television licence renewal. Darcy paid ostentatiously by credit card. But Mrs Bennet, as it befitted her class, saved up to pay with stamps.³⁵⁴

Different from the *Masterpiece Theatre* posters, which as mentioned did not show any link with (or mention of) the British partners, A&E’s publicity for *Pride And Prejudice* in America made sure the US viewers were aware of the partnership with the BBC. A half-page colour ad on *TV Guide*,³⁵⁵ featuring a graceful picture of Elizabeth Bennet and Mr Darcy and the words ‘A A&E/BBC Co-Production’, seemed to be making a clear statement: it is sexy, it is glossy, and it has the BBC seal of quality. Being an advertising-supported broadcaster, A&E also displayed in its ad an extra piece of information which probably remains to this day unknown to most of the British public: the love story between Elizabeth and Darcy was sponsored in America by two corporate brands, Lincoln Mercury Cars and Stouffer’s Lean Cuisine (part of Nestlé’s). Additionally, an editorial piece a few pages earlier also highlighted the programme’s highbrow and literary qualities, while providing some background information on Jane Austen which, one would imagine, orientated those not entirely familiar with the English writer: ‘The reclusive author, whose best-known work was published anonymously, could never have imagined her writings would enjoy such a renaissance 183 years after her death.’³⁵⁶ The international co-production was also mentioned by critic John O’Connor in *The New York Times*, with an interesting word of warning: ‘this is not, as might be expected, a

³⁵³ Jojo Moyes, ‘BBC Cashes In As “Darcy Phenomenon” Has Nation In A Swoon’, *The Independent*, 28 October 1995, p. 7.

³⁵⁴ Giddings and Selby, p. 123.

³⁵⁵ *TV Guide*, 13 January 1996, p. 90.

³⁵⁶ *TV Guide*, 13 January 1996, p. 88.

presentation of public television's *Masterpiece Theatre*. There will be commercial breaks.³⁵⁷ A *Newsweek* piece on Austen's growing popularity even quoted the following analogy by the BBC's Charles Denton: "Jane Austen is obviously the Quentin Tarantino of the middle classes."³⁵⁸ Despite the possibility of such a peculiar comment being used out of context (the article fails to provide more details on the 'obviousness' of the eighteenth-century novelist connection with the American director), it clearly attempts to 'dress' the once stuffy PBS-associated Britishness with trendier clothes.³⁵⁹

On the other hand, in Britain the serial was marketed in the non-specialised media without any mention of the American co-producer. The 23-29 September 1995 issue of *Radio Times* featured *Pride And Prejudice* on the cover, as well as a four-page editorial, which opened with the heading 'Settle down for an orgy of Austen'³⁶⁰ – a choice of words which was obviously intended to play with the 'sex romp' tabloid speculations. The magazine's following five issues also brought exclusive features, including behind the scenes material, interviews with cast and crew and details about the filming locations. None of these, however, disclosed the participation of A&E, neither did the subsequent companion book and the video about the making of the production.³⁶¹ Mention of the American co-producer could only be found in the serial's closing credits (Fig. 12), in the VHS/DVD/Blu-Ray back covers, and during the 1996 BAFTA ceremony when Ehle received the award for Best Actress for her performance as Liz Bennet (Fig. 13).



Fig. 12: *Pride And Prejudice* closing credits.

³⁵⁷ John O'Connor, 'An England Where Heart and Purse Are Romantically United', *The New York Times*, 13 January 1996, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9D0CE3DB1039F930A25752C0A960958260>.

³⁵⁸ Jack Kroll, 'Jane Austen Does Lunch', *Newsweek*, 17 December 1995, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/1995/12/17/jane-austen-does-lunch.html>.

³⁵⁹ A point further explored in Selznick's analyses of ITV/A&E co-production *Cracked*. Selznick, 2008, pp. 96-105.

³⁶⁰ Kate Lock, 'The Marring Kind', *Radio Times*, 23-29 September 1995, p. 23.

³⁶¹ Reference to the British edition of both making of video and companion book.



Fig. 13: Jennifer Ehle receives the BAFTA for Best Actress for her performance. The video clip of the ceremony (available at <http://youtu.be/4UVePaC8HGg>) demonstrates that the partnership with the US cable channel was openly marked during that occasion.

As it was produced in the mid-1990s, *Pride And Prejudice* was a typical product of a transition period between the TV II and TV III eras. As networks began moving away from broadcasting to narrowcasting – a quest for smaller communities and niche groups of more sophisticated viewers valued by advertisers – the TV II period is characterised by the beginning of what is now known as ‘quality television.’³⁶² The period was also marked by the advent of cable television and the VCR, the latter introducing the concept of ‘time-shifting’ which constituted a threat for advertisers as it permitted the viewers to determine ‘what’ and ‘when’ they would consume television content. Consequently, strategies such as catering to specific market niches – as well as developing audience loyalty – started to play a crucial role in the television industry from then onwards. In turn, the TV III period (also branded as the ‘era of plenty’ by Ellis) is characterised by endless viewer choice, which makes branding particularly relevant and in fact fundamental for differentiating a channel from all the available choices. During this new era, ancillary products began to play an increasingly

³⁶² See Feuer *et al.* (1984) and Thompson (1997).

important role as an additional source of revenue for broadcasters, even for the ones within the public service realm such as the BBC. *Pride And Prejudice*, therefore, arrived at a moment when most broadcasters around the globe were increasingly aware of the value of marketing and branding, which began to have an effect on the entire business process, from the conception of a channel and its target audience to the design of its image and the promotion of its output. From then on, as Born calls attention to, the market-led and brand-driven American television model became a reference for most systems in Europe, both commercial and public,³⁶³ and designing cultural products to succeed not only beyond domestic markets but also within specific market niches tapped by major advertisers became critical. As it was broadcast in America in 1996, there were three brands attempting to capitalise on *Pride And Prejudice*'s high-quality aura associated with English heritage and literature: Lincoln Mercury Cars, Nestlé's Stouffer's Lean Cuisine and, of course, A&E itself. Within that context, it comes as no surprise that the previously mentioned promotional ads for the serial in the US did refer to the partnership, as an association with the BBC brand and its high-culture aura was seen as beneficial by the corporations involved – all targeting especially lucrative niche markets.

When it comes to international niche markets, as scholar Andrew Higson reminds us in his article on English heritage exported to America, the Unique Selling Point (USP) of a foreign television brand can be precisely its exoticism, its foreignness – as long as 'the sense of cultural difference is not too great.'³⁶⁴ In that sense, the USP of the BBC brand, when it comes to American niche audiences, does not need to carry the same attributes and values that are deemed 'ideal' to British audiences (i.e. accessible, innovative, intelligent and stylish, as aforementioned). They certainly contribute in forming its worldwide general perception, but the attributes valued by international niche audiences such as PBS's and A&E's cannot be assumed to be the same; in fact, 'Britishness' and 'quality', as put by a number of scholars,³⁶⁵ seem to remain across time the central appeal of BBC output outside Britain. While nationwide the BBC brand was used to increase value perception for licence-fee payers, PBS and A&E instead used the BBC's programmes, and not necessarily its brand attributes, to distinguish themselves in the competitive American market. Staging the best of British quality fare would thus become their own USP - not so unique, however, once BBC America was launched.

³⁶³ Born, 2004, p. 255.

³⁶⁴ Higson, 2006, p. 213.

³⁶⁵ See Miller (2000), Giddings and Selby (2001), Steemers (2004) and Selznick (2008).

Küng-Shankleman believes that the worldwide strength of the BBC brand is essential in an ‘era of proliferating media supply channels and cross-media fertilisation.’³⁶⁶ Not only that, the period drama genre – the very essence of BBC’s international brand image³⁶⁷ during Birt’s administration – has the ability to travel beyond the domestic realm, an aspect which ‘will inevitably influence the choice of material and even further, the manner of its treatment’³⁶⁸ (a point which will be explored in the next chapter). Such ability applies to the film business as well, as argued by Higson, who believes that central to the marketing of the various Jane Austen cinema adaptations in the 1990s was the effort to

create products that could work both as mainstream romantic drama and as tasteful and ‘authentic’ Austen adaptations. (...) The key point to make here is that the exploitation of that niche should be understood as a vital component in the globalisation of the media industry.³⁶⁹

The mid-1990s was also a period when a more devoted kind of fandom played a more decisive role in the marketing of television programmes, as well as the consumption of related ancillary products and memorabilia. ‘The engagement of the fan audience with cult television (...) goes far beyond the hour the program is on the air,’³⁷⁰ argue Epstein *et al.* Marina Ramos-Serrano and Javier Lozano-Delmar also maintain that from the TV III era onwards the consumption of a programme is not limited to its viewing.³⁷¹ The TV III era encourages a more obsessive and commodity-fetishist (or commodity-completist³⁷² as suggested by fandom studies academic Matt Hills) type of fan; one that tends to be more receptive to ancillary merchandise, which in turn became easier to locate and acquire with the advent of the internet and online shops such as Amazon, Etsy and Ebay. This completist behaviour and higher level of engagement, more widespread in the TV III era, helps to put into context phenomena such as the so-called ‘Darcymania’³⁷³ (including the auction of the shirt worn by Firth in the

³⁶⁶ Küng-Shankleman, 2000, p. 105

³⁶⁷ Wearing, 08 October 2007.

³⁶⁸ Giddings and Selby, 2001, pp. 199.

³⁶⁹ Higson, 2006, pp. 207-212.

³⁷⁰ Michael Epstein, Jimmie Reeves and Mark Rogers, ‘Rewriting Popularity: The Cult Files’, in Marla Cartwright, Angela Hague and David Lavery (Eds.), *Deny All Knowledge: Reading The X-Files* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), p. 26.

³⁷¹ Marina Ramos-Serrano and Javier Lozano-Delmar, ‘Promoting *Lost*. New Strategies And Tools Of Commercial Communication’, in Miguel A. Pérez-Gómez (Ed.), *Previously On: Interdisciplinary Studies On TV Series In The Third Golden Age Of Television* (Sevilla: Biblioteca de la Facultad de Comunicación de la Universidad de Sevilla, 2011), p. 424.

³⁷² Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 29.

³⁷³ Moyes, 28 October 1995, p. 7.

famous lake scene)³⁷⁴ and the astonishing sales figures of the programme's videocassette. The business potential of such activities did not go unnoticed by other media venues; *The Independent*, for instance, quoted a BBC spokeswoman in an article about the 'Darcy Phenomenon': "We even had one national newspaper begging us for posters of Darcy to give away". 'The Sun?' asks the journalist, to which she replies: "No, it was *The Times*, actually."³⁷⁵ The serial's impact was equally noticed in the book trade, as sales of Austen's novel remained in the best-sellers lists for months, reaching a total of 150,000 units sold by November 1995.³⁷⁶ Giddings and Selby argue that such trends have significantly affected the aesthetic nature of the classic serial, especially from the mid-1990s on, as not only has it become 'tied in with the marketing of books, but with the video cassette revolution classic serials are now available as artefacts for hire or purchase and may be consumed at home.'³⁷⁷

It can also be argued that the classic serial was not the only genre developing a reliance on additional sources of income: from study kits for classroom use to tie-in paperbacks, soundtracks, behind the scenes books, photos, videos, games, travelling exhibitions of the costumes and so on. Initially an American phenomenon as well a niche one, the emergence of television ancillary products in the TV III era is a trend without doubt encouraged by media conglomerates with an eye on the global markets, handling television programmes as part of an 'international cultural commodity market.'³⁷⁸ Despite the fact that some critics do frown upon the idea of a non-commercial station pursuing income that could compromise its independence,³⁷⁹ these supplementary products tend to be seen by most executives as indispensable to extend the shelf life of programmes, especially in the current digital economy when not only related merchandise but the programmes themselves need to be available throughout a varied range of online venues that include Amazon.com and the iTunes Online Store.

5.5. The 2000s: an overview

Before closing this chapter, it is significant to very briefly address some aspects of the 2000s which, despite being outside of the intended time frame of this thesis, nonetheless show an interesting shift that is relevant to the arguments here presented.

³⁷⁴ The shirt was later sold for £500 to an anonymous female fan. 'Darcy Shirt Raises Pounds 500', *The Times*, 20 November 1995.

³⁷⁵ Moyes, 28 October 1995, p. 7.

³⁷⁶ Giddings and Selby, 2001, p. 123.

³⁷⁷ Giddings and Selby, 2001, pp. 194-5.

³⁷⁸ Giddings and Selby, 2001, pp. 119.

³⁷⁹ DiGiacomo, December 1997, p. 31.

Firstly, there is the arrival of a digital and hyper-connected era, where viewers are able to find high quality programming on countless channels and on different venues and platforms. Within this challenging new context, the BBC has partnered with a new American outlet, one that differs from WGBH and A&E in two very specific aspects: brand power and financial power. HBO, the multi-awarded premium cable channel responsible for global hits like *Sex And The City*, *The Sopranos* and *Six Feet Under*, had already developed successful joint-projects with the BBC (such as *Band Of Brothers* in 2001). It was nevertheless in 2005, with the release of the twelve-part series *Rome*, that the partnership truly took off, allowing the BBC to develop edgier co-produced material - at least more ground-breaking than what had been so far developed with previous collaborators. *Rome*, in fact, was at the time considered the most expensive TV drama not only co-produced with America but also in the history of the BBC. There is, however, a higher price to pay when getting into a co-production with a US premium cable broadcaster: it will most likely demand an even higher level of creative and editorial involvement than PBS and A&E. In the words of Caroline Torrance, Head of International Drama at Granada International, during an interview to Steemers:

‘(...) Showtime, HBO and Turner are absolutely one hundred per cent co-producers and they’ll be very demanding editorially. You have to put American actors in, usually at least two well-known American actors. (...) The first actor you see has got to be an American actor. It can’t open in Liverpool with Julie Walters, even though she’s quite well-known.’³⁸⁰

HBO has in fact a strong and strategically well-built brand image, which is respected by the industry, by the critics and by the audience – even the non-subscribers. Its funding format allows it not only to be unbound by advertisers’ concerns, but also to have much larger budgets at hand; all of which, in turn, makes HBO a very distinctive partner (one who brings a whole new set of challenges, especially regarding editorial control issues). Powell argues that the BBC has a lot to gain with this partnership, as HBO’s brand image is seen as very trendy and hip by British young viewers; very different from, for instance, PBS’s.

Rome is almost completely the other way around. It’s exactly the flip side of this. The BBC put in a very, very small percentage. So they [the BBC] are lucky they managed to get quite a big credit.³⁸¹

³⁸⁰ Caroline Torrance, quoted in Steemers, 2004, p. 117.

³⁸¹ Powell, 17 September 2007.

He adds:

(...) over here [in Britain], for instance, in this new environment with so many different channels, because HBO has done so many good shows, so they are really cool and hip, it's an advantage to promote it. Because everybody goes 'Oh, it's HBO, it's going to be cool, hip, American'. The young might turn on to watch, so it becomes a positive tool to help you to get the audience in.³⁸²

Not only help to get younger audiences in, but also help to get the British media critics on board. After all, different from PBS (which, despite being public, depended on funding from an oil company, for instance) and A&E (which depended on advertising funding), HBO has better chances to be regarded as a 'virtuous-enough' partner for the BBC. Thus, when compared to other American partners, HBO's impeccable reputation as a critically acclaimed producer of high quality television could be considered much 'less harmful' to the BBC's honourable traditions. An assessment that makes even more sense if one takes into account that HBO promotes itself as 'non-television', i.e., above the medium's vulgarities and dependence on advertisers – in a way much similar to the BBC. In fact, when writing about the excellent new standards of American programmes, especially from premium cable, Rixon claims that as they have been shaped to target 'more upmarket audiences, much of the earlier attack on its formulaic and standardised form have been replaced by critical acclaim.'³⁸³ As a result, the long-lived suspicion towards US producers, the belief that they could bring nothing of value to British television, seems to lessen when a high profile premium cable channel is concerned.

Secondly, it is appropriate to address the return of WGBH as the BBC's main co-production partner during this period. As A&E reduced significantly the participation of British output in its programming by the late 1990s, the number of deals with the cable channel gradually lessened, giving WGBH and *Masterpiece Theatre* the opportunity to once again become the biggest outlet for British drama in US television,³⁸⁴ a position it holds to this day. Conversely, the amount of funding coming from the American public broadcaster reduced drastically after Mobil pulled out its underwriting in 2004 (after having invested nearly one quarter of a billion dollars³⁸⁵ over a period of twenty years). As mentioned by

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Rixon, 2006, p. 5.

³⁸⁴ Steemers, 2004, p. 114.

³⁸⁵ Eaton, 2010.

Powell, after that the amount of money put in became minute;³⁸⁶ it, in fact, became less frequent but more focused, as by 2008 *Masterpiece Theatre* received a ‘facelift’³⁸⁷ so as to better respond to the overly fragmented media landscape. To better appeal to a set of niches beyond the ‘middle-aged, middle-class’ demographics,³⁸⁸ while still maintaining its intrinsic notion of ‘culturedness’, the series was split into three sub-strands: *Classic*, *Mystery!* and *Contemporary*. Additionally, the word ‘theatre’ was completely removed from the title, a new opening music theme was devised, and new presenters were invited - including American hosts Gillian Anderson and Laura Linney, as well as British Matthew Goode, Alan Cumming and David Tennant (Fig. 14). As recently declared by Eaton, the series’ average audience age is between 60 and 65 years old; consequently, they are focusing on ‘bringing in new audiences.’³⁸⁹ The strategic move suggests that the highbrow quality alone might not be appealing enough for the younger and more diversified audiences targeted by the producers.



Fig. 14: Masterpiece’s new hosts

Without Mobil Oil’s sponsorship, funding for the series is currently provided by two corporations - Ralph Lauren and Viking River Cruises - which have been capitalising on their investment with *Downton Abbey*-inspired ads (Fig. 15) and *Masterpiece*-themed direct mail (Fig. 16).

³⁸⁶ Powell, 17 September 2007.

³⁸⁷ Eaton, 2010.

³⁸⁸ Knox, 2012, p. 41.

³⁸⁹ Eaton, 2010.



Fig. 15: Ralph Lauren's *Downton Abbey*-inspired advertising campaign for its 2012 collection.

On a positive note, the *Mystery!* and *Contemporary* sub-strands create an alternative venue for British TV fare outside the over exhausted period drama genre – an interesting development that certainly requires further research. The co-produced series *Sherlock* (BBC/Masterpiece,³⁹⁰ 2010-), for instance, has attained the highest viewing rates for *Masterpiece* in eleven years.³⁹¹ Despite the fact that it still capitalises on British heritage, its popularity – especially amongst younger audiences – could mean an increase in demand for more contemporary British drama. Nevertheless, the *Classic* sub-strand remains to this day one of the most important venues in America for co-produced period drama, including multi-awarded serials such as *Cranford* (BBC/WGBH, 2007-2008), the new *Upstairs, Downstairs* (BBC/Masterpiece, 2010-) and ITV's *Downton Abbey* (Carnival Films/Masterpiece, 2010-).

³⁹⁰ By the end of the decade, co-productions began to be signed 'A *Masterpiece* Co-Production' instead of 'A WGBH Co-Production'.

³⁹¹ Eaton, 2010.


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Fig. 16: Like Mobil's posters, this promotional email by Viking River Cruises, sent in 2012, does not mention the British producing partners, although it does emphasise the fact that *Downton Abbey* and *Sherlock* brought *Masterpiece* a total of 37 Emmy nominations.

5.6. Conclusion

This chapter has presented an historical overview of the television landscape in Britain between the late 1980s and the 1990s, when public broadcasters all over the world – and especially the BBC, owing to its licence-based system – were more than ever feeling the pressures of a more cluttered and competitive market. It illustrates the period with the case of *Pride And Prejudice*, a co-production between the BBC and the American cable channel Arts and Entertainment Network.

Despite Powell's argument that the corporation needed 'not concern itself' with comparisons to dramas produced by the commercial channels,³⁹² it appears that comparisons were after all a cause of concern. In order to produce programmes with similar high standards, the BBC had to search for additional funds not only outside the licence fee but also outside the public broadcasting realm. As the cable system was blooming in America at the time, A&E fitted the profile: it branded itself as a 'high quality' network, it had more money to offer, and it was aiming for a niche audience rather similar to PBS's. Thus, by the late 1980s, A&E began not only poaching PBS formats as the basis for its schedule³⁹³ but also scooping up the best British drama co-production deals. Like PBS, A&E also benefited from the association with British television, as American elites have for long perceived it as the opposite of ordinary and lowbrow. In fact, within the so called 'vast wasteland' of American television, a public service broadcaster and a niche cable channel had a great deal to gain with an association with British culture – even though driven by slightly different motivations. As Steemers suggests, the appeal for WGBH (and consequently Mobil) resided mostly on being associated with a longstanding literary tradition, whereas for A&E the priority seemed to be achieving commercial objectives with no particular commitment to British drama.³⁹⁴ Nevertheless, a case could be made that, as both American channels were intended for elites, the element of Britishness present in both the heritage themed content and in the BBC's brand image was able to grant their own brands a unique aura of prestige. Such an aura seems to accompany even those programmes produced by the ITV companies, as is the case with *Brideshead Revisited*, *Upstairs, Downstairs* (and more recently *Downton Abbey*) which, as shown earlier, are often mistakenly credited to the BBC by the American public and sometimes even by media commentators.

One of the most celebrated and lucrative co-produced dramas, generating 500,000 extra pounds for the BBC that year,³⁹⁵ *Pride And Prejudice* is credited to have uncovered the potential of the genre in both national and international markets.³⁹⁶ The serial was product of a transition between the TV II and TV III eras: it counted on intense promotional and branding efforts directed to specific niche markets, as well as on the consumption of ancillary products and collectables by highly engaged fans. By offering a middle ground between 'refined' and 'mass appeal', it triggered a huge wave of classic literature adaptations during

³⁹² Lennon, 20 September 1985.

³⁹³ Marcus, 2003, p. 56.

³⁹⁴ Steemers, 2004, pp. 117-119.

³⁹⁵ Moyes, 28 October 1995, p. 7.

³⁹⁶ Giddings and Selby, 2001, p. 80.

the 1990s,³⁹⁷ some with A&E itself. However, non-British audiences seldom distinguish between public or commercial British television channels, thus for most international viewers period dramas are synonymous with the BBC. In a positive light, it means the BBC brand has a lot of leverage worldwide, commonly receiving credit for other production outlets; on the downside, it means that the ‘*Pride And Prejudice* effect’ could have also helped the ITV companies to scoop some of those co-production deals with A&E, i.e. *Emma* (1996), *Jane Eyre* (1997), *Tess Of The D'Urbervilles* (1998) and *Horatio Hornblower* (1999). Yet, according to a rather misguided article in the *Los Angeles Times*,³⁹⁸ all of those titles were co-produced with the BBC, once again reinforcing the argument that the Britishness and high culture component is in fact bound to the worldwide image of the BBC.

This period also saw a number of edgy and innovative contemporary dramas, such as award-winning *The Boys From The Blackstuff* (1982), *Edge Of Darkness* (1985), *The Singing Detective* (1986) and *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (1989). Despite their critical acclaim, those are not easy to assimilate or essentially appealing for international audiences; in fact, they are the type of programmes usually described as ‘too dark’ and ‘depressing’ by overseas buyers (see next chapter), and often categorised as ‘unsaleable’ by American companies like Time-Life. This was a period, more than any other to that point, marked by an increasing tension between culture and strategy at the BBC, a conflict that Küng-Shankleman dubs ‘Reithianism versus Birtism.’³⁹⁹ Market research, ratings and overseas sales grew in importance, as under John Birt’s command the once ‘introverted and narcissistic’⁴⁰⁰ BBC was more than ever looking outside itself and outside its once parochial strategies. Although usually associated with Birt’s reign at the BBC, this shift towards a more commercial thinking was also encouraged by the government, from Thatcher’s and Major’s plans to ‘reconfigure the UK TV industry along more commercial and deregulated lines’⁴⁰¹ to the New Labour agenda of developing the creative industries. The long-lasting conflict between art and commerce, one that has always haunted the BBC, seems to have reached its climax during the late 1990s, as pressures were coming not only from the increasingly competitive market but also from the government’s agenda to improve the balance of trade of British television.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ Susan King, ‘The Essence Of *Tess*’, *The Los Angeles Times*, 13 September 1998, <http://articles.latimes.com/1998/sep/13/news/tv-22152>.

³⁹⁹ Küng-Shankleman, 2000, p. 165.

⁴⁰⁰ Born, 2004, p. 256.

⁴⁰¹ Blanchard, 2006, p. 41.

6. CHAPTER FIVE: Perceptions of British television

‘This is what we learned: Britain is NOT perceived by people in other countries to produce “the best television in the world.”’⁴⁰²

From the early days of international deals – when Time-Life would request more ‘saleable’ content – to the more bluntly commercial direction taken in the 1990s – sanctioned by official reports such as *Building A Global Audience* - the BBC has played the difficult part of trying to produce dramas which would be appealing enough for international markets without compromising its public service ethos. After looking at this three-decade period – specifically at the BBC’s experiences with two main co-production partners – one notices two main aspects, choice of content and production values, most frequently referred to as ‘possibly influenced’ or ‘threatened’ by American market preferences. Already briefly mentioned in previous chapters, these qualities will be discussed at length in this chapter.

6.1. Grey versus sleek

Ian Trethowan, BBC Director General between 1977 and 1982, wrote in his memoirs: ‘If the BBC becomes too depressed by its domestic critics it can always find solace in the esteem of its public overseas.’⁴⁰³ If some reports and claims by overseas buyers were to be taken into account, however, it could be argued that the former DG had overestimated the foreign esteem towards British drama. Despite the popular notion, at least in some circles, that British television is ‘the best in the world,’⁴⁰⁴ statistics show that it is not always the ‘most liked’ by audiences around the world. Although often praised for its innovative and educative qualities, when it comes to its pace, look and feel, particularly in drama, overseas reactions to indigenous British TV fare are not entirely positive. There is obviously the question of British production budgets (especially for a non-commercial broadcaster such as the BBC)⁴⁰⁵ not being as generous as in America, where a one-hour drama could cost an average of US\$ 3

⁴⁰² *Building A Global Audience: British Television In Overseas Markets* (London: DCMS, 1999), p. 8.

⁴⁰³ Ian Trethowan, *Split Screen* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984), p. 193.

⁴⁰⁴ Steemers, 2004, p. xiii.

⁴⁰⁵ The average drama budget at the BBC was £540,000 per hour by the mid-2000s. Hulls, April 2006, p. 33.

million.⁴⁰⁶ Despite the new standards set in Britain by glossy productions shot on film and in breath-taking locations since ITV's *Brideshead Revisited* (which have 'made it difficult to go back to the days of translating literary works into interior-dominated studio-drama'),⁴⁰⁷ British television continued to be regarded as unappealing within the circuit outside the niche cable and public broadcasters. As O'Regan points out, British TV tends to be simultaneously admired and derided internationally: 'It is the bastion of quality and high culture (as opposed to the commercial low culture of Hollywood), or out of touch with audiences who reject such élite, class-bound fare.'⁴⁰⁸ The reasons behind such mixed reactions are, O'Regan believes, intrinsically tied up with its public television reputation.

This 'admired' versus 'derided' dichotomy of UK television has also been referred to in the 1999 *Building A Global Audience* report: 'British television has been, and much British television still is, controlled by a strong sense of conflict between art and commerce.'⁴⁰⁹ The study attempted to answer the following question: 'Why do our television programmes not perform better in overseas markets?'⁴¹⁰ and finally concluded that British television was, by the end of the millennium, still seen as 'the wrong type'⁴¹¹ by international buyers, recommending the industry should develop more 'positive, glossy, mainstream drama series that would command interest overseas.'⁴¹² Funded by both the private sector as well as the Department of National Heritage (which later became the Department of Culture, Media and Sports), *Building A Global Audience* helps to illustrate the pressure that had been coming not only from the market, but also from the government, as the initiative was part of the New Labour agenda of developing the creative industries in the late 1990s. Beginning in October 1997 and completed in January 1999, it used not only interviews with overseas buyers but also international audience ratings data in order to illustrate the success or failure of British programmes with the viewers within twelve countries across the globe.⁴¹³ It also aimed to 'highlight opportunities for UK distributors thereby enabling them to compete more

⁴⁰⁶ Richard Verrier and Andrea Chang, 'Writers Strike Could Cost \$21.3 Million A Day', *The Los Angeles Times*, 21 November 2007, http://www.latimes.com/la-fi-strike21nov21_0,5160818.story?coll=la-home-center.

⁴⁰⁷ Loader, September 1996, p. 21.

⁴⁰⁸ Tom O'Regan, 'The International Circulation Of British Television', in Edward Buscombe (Ed.), *British Television: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 317.

⁴⁰⁹ *Building A Global Audience: British Television In Overseas Markets*, 1999, p. 12.

⁴¹⁰ *Building A Global Audience: British Television In Overseas Markets*, 1999, p. 8.

⁴¹¹ *Building A Global Audience: British Television In Overseas Markets*, 1999, p. 26.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*

⁴¹³ France (TF1 France 2, France 3, M6); Germany (ARD, ZDF, RTL, Sat Eins, Kabel Eins, Pro Sieben); Netherlands (NOS1, NOS2, NOS3, RTL4, RTL5); Sweden (SVT1, SVT2, TV3, TV4); Italy (RAI1, RAI2, RAI3, Italia 1, Rete 4, Canale 5); Hungary (MTV1, TV2, Duna); Spain (TVE1, La 2, Antena 3, Telecinco, Canal+); Australia (ABC, 7, 9, 10, SBS); Japan (NHK1, Fuji, TV Asahi, Wowow); Hong Kong (Star Plus); Canada (CBC, CTV, Global); and US (NBC, CBS, ABC, Fox, Discovery, A&E, PBS).

efficiently and effectively in the world programme market,' ultimately pointing to the domestic-focused regulatory and industrial culture in which British television had been developed as mainly responsible for its lack of 'efficiency'. At the time, the UK was arguably still perceived abroad as 'a self sufficient and insular operator', and amongst the main reasons for not being as competitive as it could be was the 'lack of suitable programmes to sell,'⁴¹⁴ especially to commercial stations. Although words such as 'efficiently' and 'effectively' were rather emblematic of the new market configuration, the expression 'not suitable' had indeed appeared two decades earlier in Time-Life's infamous memo.⁴¹⁵

A later report, *Rights Of Passage*, published in 2005 as an update of the previous *Building A Global Audience*, claims that six years later British television was not yet delivering what the market expected - at least in the view of the twelve overseas senior executives interviewed.⁴¹⁶ These industry executives still described UK drama as 'grey', 'depressing' and 'not uplifting', with a tendency to lack 'the high production budgets, glamorous sheen, youthful beauty and pace of the best US drama.'⁴¹⁷ In fact, Steemers points out that PBS viewers were amongst the few who, for being more familiarised to British fiction, had more patience about its slower pace;⁴¹⁸ audiences from other overseas outlets, the report indicates, were not as accepting. Another concern indicated in *Rights Of Passage* was the fact that international programme buyers at the time still expected running times and number of episodes to follow the standard American format. Three years after its publication, however, there were signs that such a trend could be changing – possibly as a side effect of the 2008 American writer's strike and the growing receptiveness towards UK TV format licensing. Creator of US hit show *Heroes*, Tim Kring, told *Broadcast* that there was at the time an increasing interest amongst US broadcasters for shorter models: "I don't think it's long before we start sampling this idea of limited runs." He adds: "There are many conversations in writer's rooms all over Hollywood about how we could adopt this way of working."⁴¹⁹ As in Britain series tend to run for an average of six episodes and a couple of seasons, the industry is constantly generating new programmes. Consequently, according to *CNBC Business*, the British way 'fosters development, and the BBC, with its reputation for

⁴¹⁴ *Building A Global Audience: British Television In Overseas Markets*, 1999, p. 29.

⁴¹⁵ Paisner, 12 March 1974.

⁴¹⁶ Some of the executives interviewed for *Rights Of Passage* also took part on the 1999 study.

⁴¹⁷ *Rights Of Passage: British Television In The Global Market*, 2005, p. 30.

⁴¹⁸ Steemers, 2004, p. 118.

⁴¹⁹ Tim Kring quoted in Robin Parker, 'Heroes Creator: US Will Take Shorter UK Drama', *Broadcast*, 25 April 2008, p. 5.

experimenting, helps new ideas rise to prominence.’⁴²⁰ Additionally, screenwriter Andrew Davies argues, as audiences’ familiarity with programme formats increase and attention span decreases, aspects such as pace, structure and length also tend to change. In his opinion, audiences have learned to assimilate things quicker over the last 15 years. Thus, his 2008 version of *Sense And Sensibility* (a BBC/WGBH co-production) had only three episodes; a longer version, he believes, would not have worked in either market, British or American.⁴²¹

The issue of British television adapting to different formats, look and pace has also been examined by Rixon in his 2006 book *American Television On British Screens*. Although *Rights Of Passage* concludes that UK TV was still regarded internationally as ‘the wrong type’, Rixon argues that in the view of some British buyers and schedulers⁴²² American production values were indeed believed to have changed the face of British television. The author cites Alan Howden, BBC’s Head of Acquisitions at the time:

‘British programmes in the last ten years have converted themselves from being rather static studio bound productions to being essentially done in the same surface way as American films.’⁴²³

Rixon’s conclusion is that most of these professionals believe that, although American imports have influenced British programmes, it is due to the pressure to survive in a competitive market rather than to any form of Americanisation or cultural imposition. He sees the changes such as using film to create a slicker look, or ordering more episodes of a successful series, are simply a response to domestic and overseas market pressures, as well as an attempt to ‘create a domestic product able to compete with American imports and demands from audiences.’⁴²⁴ Rixon does call attention to the fact that it has always been a concern of policy makers, since the first years of broadcasting, that if too many American imports appeared on British screens ‘it would affect British television’s character and, in a wider sense, British culture;’⁴²⁵ the major concerns, however, have always been more related to American lowbrow culture than to glossier production values. The choice of a sleeker look thus would have more to do with market forces than with cultural dominance, he argues.

⁴²⁰ Jo Bowman, ‘The Export Factor’, *CNBC Business*, April 2011, <http://www.cnbc.com/story/the-export-factor/1344/1>.

⁴²¹ Andrew Davies, ‘Reviving The Regency’, lecture, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 20 June 2008.

⁴²² Rixon has conducted a series of interviews with British programme buyers on the subject of American television imports.

⁴²³ Alan Howden quoted in Rixon, 2006, p. 101.

⁴²⁴ Rixon, 2006, p.101.

⁴²⁵ Rixon, 2006, p. 96.

Based on the points presented above, it is possible to argue that there has been an effort by British producers to adapt to the higher expectations and production values of the international market, particularly the American one. Pressured by either market forces or by governmental agendas, this was an especially challenging adjustment for the non-advertising funded BBC. As we advance into the 1980s, technological progress, higher production values and the growth of cable, satellite and subscription-funded broadcasting would only increase the pressure.

Powell, responsible for major international co-productions such as *Bleak House* (BBC/A&E, 1985) and *Tender Is The Night* (BBC/Showtime, 1985), points out that the new standards for production values were initially set by Granada:

The BBC was a big organisation that produced things in its own studios. And then Granada came along and produced *Brideshead Revisited* and *Jewel Of The Crown*. Now in order to keep up with those standards, the BBC had to counter by making its productions on film (...) You had to go out and find money in order to top up those budgets. It was kind of a big escalation of costs, and that's when the money from America was useful.⁴²⁶

His opinion is shared by Wearing, who presents very similar reasons for such trend:

The stakes kept getting higher ever since *Brideshead Revisited*, which was a hugely expensive production (...) That set the bar, it was all on film, and it just looked better than the studio-based BBC house-style drama.⁴²⁷

All the issues surrounding British television production values, visual treatment and pace justify, to a certain extent, the growth of another category of international television trade: the sale of licensed formats, i.e., the sales of rights to adapt a programme in another national context. This trend, initially focused on factual, game and reality shows (e.g. *The Weakest Link* and *Dancing With The Stars*, both created by the BBC), has gradually spread out to scripted shows as well, especially after what has been commonly referred to as 'The Office effect',⁴²⁸ in America. After NBC's successful remake of *The Office*,⁴²⁹ scripted comedy and drama formats began to be sought after by US networks, with varying degrees of success (e.g. *Life On Mars*, *I'm With Stupid*, *The IT Crowd*, *Spaced*).

⁴²⁶ Powell, 17 September 2007.

⁴²⁷ Wearing, 08 October 2007.

⁴²⁸ Lyn Smith, 'British Television Doing Swimmily Across The Pond', *The Los Angeles Times*, 12 November 2006, <http://www.dailycamera.com/news/2006/nov/12/tvxx3>.

⁴²⁹ Despite having had only two series in the UK, the US version of *The Office* has run for seven seasons.

Furthermore, an interesting take on the subject of format licensing is suggested by Jacques Peretti: he argues in *The Guardian* that after a long tradition of focus-groups and market research had squeezed all creative edge out of American television formats, US producers are now importing back that creativeness from Britain:

(...) the British have colonised US TV with edgy formats like *Wife Swap* that appear fresh because they haven't had the corners knocked off them; quirky comedy like *Little Britain* and *The IT Crowd* that hasn't been written to death by a pool of gag-monkeys; and classy drama like *Vincent*, which isn't buried on HBO. British TV people have sold the American dream back to the Americans, but brought something a little unhinged with them that works for mainstream TV. This element had been ground out of US formats over 20 years of relentless focus-grouping, and now they want it back.⁴³⁰

Yet, such edge and creativeness seem better appreciated once it comes in importable licensed formats, as the original concept can then receive the necessary treatment and become more palatable to US viewers. A point that brings to mind Steemers's argument that British television better appeals to a mass audience when its Britishness is disguised.⁴³¹ In fact, from the audience's perspective, much of the UK content remade for the US has little Britishness about it, as Bowman points out: 'Americans largely don't know – and don't care – that their must-see shows came from elsewhere';⁴³² unless, of course, we are talking about bonnets and English heritage.

6.2. Content that sells

If, on one hand, 'grey' and 'depressing' has not performed well across the Atlantic – even with larger budgets and technology improvements – there is one specific genre which has long been associated with quality British TV: period drama. UK television has acquired an extraordinary reputation worldwide for first-class period dramas, with the BBC widely credited for having 'invented' a genre that was since the early Reithian days designed to help build audience loyalty – initially for radio – while preserving a tradition of public service broadcasting.⁴³³ In fact, the international image of the BBC is so closely associated with classic serials that it is often given credit for any British made programmes, including the original *Upstairs, Downstairs* (1971-5) and *Brideshead Revisited* (1981), both actually

⁴³⁰ Jacques Peretti, 'How British TV Stormed The US', *The Guardian*, 22 November 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/g2/story/0,,1953737,00.html>.

⁴³¹ Steemers, 2004, p. 110.

⁴³² Bowman, April 2011.

⁴³³ Giddings and Selby, 2001.

originated by ITV companies⁴³⁴ (a recurrent mistake that is helped by the fact that cable channel BBC America also screens programmes produced by Channel Four and ITV to US audiences).

Scholars such as O'Regan, Steemers and Giddings and Selby believe that this programme genre has performed so well abroad that it has caused the BBC – as well as other British broadcasters – to overemphasise this type of drama, which became a favourite for co-produced fare especially from the 1980s onwards. As a deliberate emphasis on such dramas could indeed become a safe solution to the art and commerce conflict, it could, on the other hand, prevent the BBC to produce programming that is truly culturally daring:

...it is now common for the Corporation to secure at pre-production stage co-production funding from overseas – usually the USA – to underwrite budget costs. (...) Consequently, the BBC is no longer able to embark on drama production in a spirit of free market aesthetic or cultural do-gooding. (...) Drama series have perforce to bear American audiences in mind.⁴³⁵

The need for a less risky output when it came to cross-cultural productions was another likely reason for concentrating on that genre. Contemporary drama – especially involving national socio-political themes – has seldom travelled well, and anything that seemed to be too reflective of or too particular of British culture carried the risk of putting off American audiences. During a BBC Drama Group meeting in 1996, Susie Gold, manager in charge of co-production funds, made an interesting point on the need of minimising cultural discount: “Classics sell. (...) Social issues drama won't sell abroad: it's a very British genre.”⁴³⁶ According to Born (who observed the meeting), even the classics were classified according to their saleability: Austen was easy to sell, Dickens not so much.⁴³⁷ In fact, the complexities of making Dickens more appealing to overseas audiences have also been experienced by award-winning playwright Michael Eaton; after being hired to work on a BBC adaptation of *The Pickwick Papers*, the piece was later turned down by American co-producers ‘on the grounds that there was no love interest in the story.’⁴³⁸ In other words, it seems that there would be little opportunity for incorporating a kiss in its final scene. Eaton also declared to *Television*

⁴³⁴ See Scott (11 March 1976, p. 6) and Giddings and Selby (2001, p. 196). The latter cite the common mistake of Paul Baumann who, writing for *Commonweal*, mentions how pleased he was that under his Christmas tree there were ‘all six videocassettes of the now antique BBC miniseries *Brideshead Revisited*.’

⁴³⁵ Giddings and Selby, 2001, p. 119.

⁴³⁶ Born, 2004, p.168.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Michael Eaton, lecture, Birkbeck, London, 13 May 2008.

Today that the pressure to find themes which will more easily travel internationally tend to 'restrict co-productions to areas like adaptations of novels and dramatisations of original events, possibly at the cost of writers' original ideas.'⁴³⁹ Thus the choice of content in a co-produced drama will more often than not be affected by cultural and market factors.

Tracey comments on the risk of public broadcasting changing its own nature and worthy ambitions into products that are 'all together too bland and nice'⁴⁴⁰ to be internationally competitive. The tendency of choosing topics that raise little controversy is, in fact, mentioned by one of the American programme buyers interviewed by Strover:

'We don't have enough common ground with the Europeans. For a long time, the main theme of co-productions was World War II, but we have to find other commonalities besides the war and spy stories about the Cold War.'⁴⁴¹

In that sense, Strover appropriately concludes that if co-productions are 'essentially an industrial response' to economic and market pressures, then it should not come as a surprise that 'new creativity is not its trademark.'⁴⁴² International co-productions will then, as a rule, tend to concentrate on themes that are commercially viable across markets in order to minimise cultural discount. In fact, the cinema industry in the 1980s and 1990s was also heavily criticised for the wave of heritage films (*Room With A View*, *Howard's End*, *Shadowlands*) which did well in America but, according to Selznick, were critiqued for their conservative politics as well as their commercial appeal.⁴⁴³ Writing on the appeal of costume drama films, Higson creates an argument that could easily be used to explain the same trend in the television market:

One of the things that happens to the familiar, indigenous story when it moves into an export market is that it becomes an exotic cultural good. But we should also recognise that the representation of, say, the English upper middle classes in the early nineteenth century may be just as exotic to contemporary audiences in England as it is to modern American audiences, given the elements of pastness, the class specificity and the cultural extravagance on display in the films. At the same time, cultural representations designed for a consumer market must never be allowed to become too unfamiliar, too exotic, for fear of what media economists and others call 'cultural discount...'⁴⁴⁴

⁴³⁹ Towler, 12 July 1990, p. 20.

⁴⁴⁰ Michael Tracey, 'Popular Culture And The Economics Of Global Television', *InterMedia*, Volume 16, No 2, 1988, p. 24.

⁴⁴¹ Quoted in Strover, 1995, p. 119.

⁴⁴² Strover, 1995, p. 121.

⁴⁴³ Selznick, 2008, p. 78.

⁴⁴⁴ Higson, 2006, p. 203.

Powell strongly opposes this theory; he believes that all American money has done is to help the BBC keep on with an already well-established tradition of public service broadcasting: '[T]hey have a cultural significance, really, in terms of defining the BBC's role.'⁴⁴⁵ The executive believes such dramatisations are a staple of British broadcasting, and since they are part of the Reithian legacy, they are thus inherent to the BBC.

The BBC always wanted to do costume dramas, and certainly the money from A&E particularly, more than WGBH, made it possible by bringing down the cost, but it's not the same as saying that the BBC produced a lot of costume drama because the money was there. That's usually a criticism from the kind of critics that just want to have a go at it.⁴⁴⁶

Powell's comment brings to mind his interview to *The Times* in 1985, when journalist Peter Lennon described the BBC executive as 'no Tony Garnett', suggesting he was not politically committed nor wished to spend his life 'sparring with his controllers.'⁴⁴⁷ Willis, whose experience includes public broadcasters on both sides of the Atlantic, shares Powell's view on costume drama. During an interview, he declared that the emphasis on costume dramas has always gone beyond the need to sell to overseas markets. In his view, they are part of the BBC's duty as a public service broadcaster:

The BBC is like a giant illustrated public library. You would expect to find the classics there, and judging by the figures the classics are very much wanted. (...) The classics are made for British audiences – it so happens that the PBS audiences like them too.⁴⁴⁸

Wearing, on the other hand, argues that the decision to overemphasise costume drama had indeed a lot to do with the worldwide brand image strategy introduced by Birt in the 1990s. Although he acknowledges that the BBC has in fact built a worldwide reputation as a bastion of high culture, Wearing believes that once it was internally determined that the classics were to be at the core of BBC's international brand image, the dependence on co-production budgets was also inherently established:

When I got the job [as Head of Serials, 1989], it was just at the beginning of all this 'what's the purpose of the BBC' stuff, the committees set up by Birt, and they decided the

⁴⁴⁵ Powell, 17 September 2007.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Lennon, 20 September 1985.

⁴⁴⁸ Willis, 17 September 2007.

worldwide brand image of BBC drama was the classics. I remember saying something sarcastic at the time, like ‘It’s all very well, but can we afford it since you’ve selected the most expensive form of television ever known to mankind as your standard-bearer image?’ I knew they could not fully fund it. (...) You are in some way responsible for the overall output of the various traditions in drama, and one of them is contemporary original work for television. There was a Golden Age, Dennis Potter is the classical example, and Tony Garnett, who did real socially engaged work. It was equally important to protect that aspect of the output – but that’s not the kind of work that gets financed, because it’s risky.⁴⁴⁹

He believes that, as a public service broadcaster, the BBC’s duty goes beyond being a large ‘illustrated public library’; it should also stimulate the production of indigenous thought-provoking drama. ‘It was one of the BBC inventions that television drama in British social terms could be engaged.’⁴⁵⁰ This type of programme however has little appeal to foreign audiences, and is unlikely to receive overseas funding. In an age when television insularity does not go hand in hand with commercial success, he points out that the main risk is that of British licence-fee payers being forced a diet of bland commercially appealing drama at the expense of insular yet socially relevant ones.

Another instance of this conflict can be found in a rather tense meeting narrated by Born, during which a recently arrived marketing manager – having previously worked for mega corporation Procter & Gamble – presented the coming year marketing plan to the Drama Group (including Wearing himself and Charles Denton, his superior). One can notice the scepticism and disdain coming from the ‘artistic side’ (represented by the Drama Group members), as the ‘business side’ (represented by the marketing specialist) advocated the importance of boosting branding campaigns and on- and off-air promotion. As marketing highlighted ‘the need to promote Sunday-night period drama,’ Denton is described as quickly shooting back: “‘We want to avoid BBC1 being perceived as a ‘heritage’ channel with ‘theme park’ drama’”.⁴⁵¹ Despite Denton’s clear contempt towards the marketing plans presented in the meeting, ‘heritage channel’⁴⁵² was in fact the international image chosen for the BBC (unsurprisingly, Denton left the BBC a few months after that meeting).

Tony Garnett, producer of acclaimed British dramas such as *Cathy Come Home* and *Up The Junction*, also believes in the importance of keeping contemporary socially engaged drama alive in public broadcasting; for it to happen, however, he thinks producers need more freedom and more power:

⁴⁴⁹ Wearing, 08 October 2007.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ Denton, quoted by Born, 2004, p. 266.

⁴⁵² Wearing, 08 October 2007.

In those days [referring to the ‘Golden Age of British television’], the BBC was very self-confident, and believed in ‘producer power’. There was not much interference coming from controllers and heads of department, and the producers had much more freedom to do as they liked. As a producer I often decided the ‘what’, ‘who’ and ‘how’ of a project.⁴⁵³

Garnett suggests that in order to get a project of a socio-political nature off the ground nowadays it is necessary to make ‘Trojan horse dramas’, i.e., ‘telling the institution you are doing one thing and then smuggling something else.’⁴⁵⁴ As an example he cites his own controversial series *The Cops* (BBC, 1998-2001), initially pitched simply as a ‘cop show’ to the Corporation. As nowadays drama has, in his view, to be profitable, he argues that cutting edge projects end up stumbling on various structural institutional barriers.

If you propose them to the BBC, instead of telling you the truth: ‘No, it’s too political’, they will just say something vague like ‘I’m afraid there isn’t an audience for that.’⁴⁵⁵

Three decades ago Scott was already aware of the lack of commercial appeal of those programmes to overseas audiences; in the BBC’s 1976 internal paper *Going It Together*, he recognises that other broadcasters should ‘hesitate to invest in highly personalised or partisan programmes.’ Those programmes, he adds, are ‘best left for purely national production,’ and thus the BBC would normally be expected ‘to produce controversial programmes with its own resources.’⁴⁵⁶ Economic circumstances of the following decades have accentuated the need for programmes of a more ‘uncommitted nature’. As bluntly revealed by Juliet Grim, BBC’s Director of Co-productions and Business Development in an interview to *The Times* in 1995: “‘This is the era of the costume drama. There is a real demand for quality productions of this nature around the world and it is something the BBC has always been brilliant at.’”⁴⁵⁷ Although there is no record, at least on paper, that period drama sales were conspicuously used to fund other types of programmes at the BBC, accounts such as Grim’s (as well as Wearing’s and Denton’s) suggest that they were strategically crucial to the preservation of a distinctive level of output the Corporation had become accustomed to but was no longer entirely capable of delivering under the growing economic pressures.

Writing about *Masterpiece Theatre*, Simone Knox argues that British programmes such as

⁴⁵³ Tony Garnett, lecture, Birkbeck, London, 06 May 2008.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ Scott, 11 March 1976, p. 4.

⁴⁵⁷ Frean, 23 October 1995.

A Very British Coup (1988), *Talking Heads: Bed Among The Lentils* (1988), *Traffik* (1989) and *House Of Cards* (1990) clash with the usual generalisation that the strand used to focus mainly on heritage and literary drama.⁴⁵⁸ *Masterpiece Theatre* indeed showed a certain openness to experimenting with more contemporary and even political drama a number of times – especially during the period that coincides with the appointment of Wearing as Head of Serials. Yet, considering the specific time frame (early 1970s to late 1990s) and the type of projects this thesis focuses on (drama co-productions with America), it is still possible to maintain that costume dramas did outnumber contemporary themed ones at the time.⁴⁵⁹

For every rule, however, there is an exception, and in this case the exception is the 1985 highly acclaimed drama *Edge Of Darkness*. According to Andrew Lavender, with £400,000 of American money from Lionheart Television International Inc., the nuclear thriller ‘demonstrated that transatlantic co-production needn’t lead to a bland and conformist product.’⁴⁶⁰ Polemical, political, contemporary, *Edge Of Darkness* seemed to contain all the ingredients that tend to make international investors shy away; yet, it received a significant part of its £2 million budget from an overseas distributor. For Born, it stands to prove that the common belief that co-productions’ creative outcome can be rather predictable and that it can erode the capacity to take risks is a mistake, ‘however real the pressures for formulaic “mid-Atlantic” or “mid-European” programming.’⁴⁶¹ Although Lavender and Born do make important points, none of the scholars make any reference to the fact that the co-producer in question was in fact a company partly-owned by BBC Enterprises, a fact which would have played a part in helping the dark drama being picked for co-production. It is also important to keep in mind that *Edge Of Darkness* is a stand-alone case and, had it been produced a decade later, it would probably have come upon some negative criticism from newly implemented audience focus groups. It would also be prone to be classified as the ‘wrong type’ of content by reports such as *Building A Global Audience* and *Rights Of Passage*, or to receive the type of response mentioned by Garnett: ‘I’m afraid there isn’t an audience for that.’

⁴⁵⁸ Knox, 2012, p. 31.

⁴⁵⁹ Additionally, it is important to clarify that the examples cited by Knox are either not BBC projects (*A Very British Coup* and *Traffik* were in fact produced by Channel Four) or not co-productions (*Talking Heads: Bed Among The Lentils* and *House Of Cards* were fully-British funded).

⁴⁶⁰ Andrew Lavender, ‘*Edge Of Darkness*’, in George W. Brandt (Ed), *British Television Drama In The 1980s*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 104.

⁴⁶¹ Born, 2004, p. 165.

6.3. Conclusion

After having looked into the Corporation's experiences with American partners and into the continuous criticisms over American influence, this chapter has examined two key aspects appointed by media commentators, producers and scholars as the main causes of concern when co-producing internationally: the likely effects of US market preferences over the production values and the choice of content on British television.

Some aspects of British television drama – such as the production values, the visual treatment and the slower pace – seem to have been for years putting off international audiences (especially outside the public broadcasting or niche cable circuit). That would have led overseas executives to regard the scheduling of a British programme – be it co-produced or not – as a risk,⁴⁶² at least according to reports originated during the end of the 1990s and the first half of the 2000s. There has been, however, a visible effort from British producers to make programmes with a sleeker look, especially in the case of costume drama, where 'high production values are demanded for spectacular imagery' – although it is important that there are 'no dirty fingernails to puncture the myth,'⁴⁶³ argues Nelson. Despite such efforts, and notwithstanding its recognised educative and innovative qualities, assessment reports still claimed British TV was not the 'right' kind, and some of its 'depressing' qualities were still reported as one of the biggest obstacles for a full international success.

For some BBC executives interviewed for this thesis,⁴⁶⁴ period dramas co-funded by American money are not altogether responsible for diluting British television content, as they are seen as part of the BBC's role as a 'giant illustrated public library'. For some of these professionals, such a vocation justifies the continuous production of classic serials by the Corporation; the fact that such programmes can also be easily sold abroad – due to their lower cultural discount and consequent lower risk – seems to be just a lucky coincidence. Higson regards film adaptations of this genre as 'pre-sold commodities with an established fan base', a demand he believes to have been created in America by PBS's *Masterpiece Theatre*.⁴⁶⁵

There is, however, the issue of more contemporary, social-issue driven drama that have, in both Wearing's and Garnett's opinion, been sacrificed on the way. This type of drama tends to only exist if fully British funded. The budget for *Our Friends In The North*'s (£8 million), for instance, was just a little larger than *Pride And Prejudice*'s (£6 million), produced just one

⁴⁶² *Building A Global Audience: British Television In Overseas Markets*, 1999, p. 18.

⁴⁶³ Nelson, 1997, p. 148.

⁴⁶⁴ See Willis (2007), Powell (2007) and Shivas (2007).

⁴⁶⁵ Higson, 2006, p. 212

year earlier; but different from the dense class-centred political drama, the Austen adaptation had A&E's financial support. Regarded as 'less marketable' through a more commercial lens, they tend to be less encouraged by commissioners. The introduction to *Building A Global Audience* briefly taps into the issue, without however recommending a tangible solution:

Television is a national asset with significant export potential (...). These two characteristics are sometimes contradictory but we believe that the UK can satisfy both demands by paying more attention to the global marketplace.⁴⁶⁶

Küng-Shankleman claims the Corporation is 'required to be many, often conflicting, things at once.' As a public service broadcaster, it is expected to be 'public and private, profit- and non-profit making, a respected and responsible national institution as well as a nimble entrepreneurial entity.'⁴⁶⁷ Meanwhile, at the heart of international co-productions resides a similar conflict: glossy versus true-to-life, challenging versus conventional, insular versus broadly pleasing. After all, as pointed out by Amanda Lotz, the initial step in the process of programme creation – selecting the project to invest in – does embody 'the contradictory and contested tendencies inherent to the combination of art and commerce characteristic of cultural industries.'⁴⁶⁸ Delighting domestic audiences can mean disappointing them overseas, while putting the needs of overseas audiences above national by producing the 'right' kind of television can be deemed as excessive commercialism and unworthy of an institution such as the BBC.

An intricate equation that seems to have found in format licensing, if not the final solution, at least a convenient one. As the programme is produced locally, the risk of stumbling on cultural discount or production value issues⁴⁶⁹ tend to decrease, making licensed formats a safer bet for international buyers. With the growing demand for new original programming in the current multichannel and multiplatform environment, this specific type of trade and its effects on both British and American television markets and culture certainly deserve further scholar examination.

⁴⁶⁶ *Building A Global Audience: British Television In Overseas Markets*, 1999, p. 12.

⁴⁶⁷ Küng-Shankleman, 2000, p. 85.

⁴⁶⁸ Amanda Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), p. 91.

⁴⁶⁹ Steemers, 2004, pp. 39-40.

7. CONCLUSION

‘ITV is much more honest about it. (...) The BBC says: “Co-producers will not have editorial control”, but their services are dependent on co-production money. They [the BBC] say: “We will find a co-producer and work for their market without jeopardizing anything”. Ultimately that is going to fail.’⁴⁷⁰

The main focus of this thesis has been the BBC’s journey as an international co-producer across three decades, examining the reasons that led it to seek funding outside the licence fee and the ramifications of such enterprises through an historical, institutional and production framework. In order to restrict its scope, this thesis has exclusively addressed co-productions of one genre, drama, with one particular nation, the United States. Based on the changing relationship between the BBC and its American co-producing partners from the 1970s to the 1990s, this thesis has demonstrated that the Corporation has evolved from a hesitant partner to a major international co-producer; an achievement that nonetheless required it to downplay American involvement in the eyes of the British public as well as maintain a strict editorial control rhetoric.

While the selling of programme formats and off-the-shelf material has been more visible in public discourse as well as in academic research (Steemers, Strover, Hilmes, Knox), the issue of international drama co-productions (especially those backed by American parties) and their impact on the BBC has lacked the appropriate scholarly attention it deserves. Similarly, although the history of the BBC and its organisational culture has received substantial scholar attention (Briggs, Born, Küng-Shankleman), the extent to which drama co-productions between the UK and the US have facilitated programming since the 1970s and the resulting internal conflicts they generated at the BBC have not been thoroughly investigated in existing literature. Drawing on primary sources such as in-depth interviews with key British broadcasting executives and documents from the BBC Written Archives, as well as secondary sources such as media texts and up-to-date literature, this thesis brings an original contribution to the broadcasting history and transnational television culture scholarly debate.

⁴⁷⁰ Peter Clark quoted in Grantham, February-March 1984, p. 38.

As argued in **chapter one**, television in Great Britain has historically been associated with what is familiar and domestic, an aspect intensified by the fact it started as a public service financed by British citizens, and was therefore associated with the mission of national unification and the dissemination of a national culture.⁴⁷¹ Fear of Americanisation – a recurring issue since the early days of radio – was once again brought to the fore in the 1950s, as US television imports (and style) were increasingly becoming part of the British television ecosystem. Consequently, when American money began to be used to help producing national television, it was likely to generate major controversy. In such a context, there exists a variety of positions attributed to British television regarding the cultural trade with America, with the so-called ‘victim position’⁴⁷² being the least accurate one. Fearing the undermining of British identity, while a valid concern, can also be a simplistic one, as it neglects to value the role of American formats in inspiring the creation of original and innovative British programmes – particularly when the medium was in its infancy in the UK. Additionally, taking into account that American channels have for years blatantly relied on Britain to fill their own schedules, the ‘complementary structures’ is, if not the most well accepted, at least the most unprejudiced approach to this transnational relationship.

As shown in **chapter two**, the subject of international co-productions has generated mixed feelings amongst BBC personnel since the 1970s, much similar to the discomfort caused by the subject of American imports amongst controllers and programme buyers of the 1950s.⁴⁷³ As the Corporation adamantly claims not to share creative control with any partner, such a concern should, in theory, not exist. However, when the topic arises, be it in documented in-house debates or in personal interviews with staff members, it seems to be often accompanied by a certain degree of uneasiness – ingeniously illustrated by Gavin’s analogy of a brothel being ran from inside a monastery.⁴⁷⁴ Based on the volume of internal papers and discussions on record, executives at the BBC have for long been trying to make peace with the ‘un-Reithian’ idea of becoming more commercial, while not being entirely sure themselves of how to guarantee that the institution’s ethos would not be affected. In his analysis to the General Advisory Council in 1979, Plater wrote that co-productions were ‘very much like life;’ that is, contradictory, exciting and distressing at the same time – an opinion he

⁴⁷¹ Hilmes, 2003, p.1.

⁴⁷² Steemers, 2004, p. 11.

⁴⁷³ Hood, 1963, p. 20.

⁴⁷⁴ Gavin, 2002, quoted in Hardin, 28 January 2002.

maintained three decades later.⁴⁷⁵ The ‘commercial buccaneering’ he deemed necessary was indeed taken further by the BBC, especially from the late 1980s onwards. Once the demand increased and the risks of over-dependency on overseas money arose, however, so did the realisation that without extra-funding – something ITV could easily secure via advertising – it would be nearly impossible to produce competitive high quality drama.

In the economic context of the television industry of the late 1980s and 1990s, as seen in **chapters three and four**, laws of supply and demand were shifting drastically – and so was the BBC’s power of bargain. As co-productions gradually became the rule rather than the exception, a necessity rather than an alternative, BBC producers could no longer afford to be as cautious or as ‘Reithian’ as they had been, or tried to be, in past decades. With new global demands and new business formats, the entire notion of a cultural product having a nationality in fact required reassessing; the entire concept of a national medium, as Strover reminds us, can come to be ‘quite out of step’⁴⁷⁶ with contemporary economic realities. Focusing on the specific cases of *Masterpiece Theatre* and *Pride And Prejudice*, these chapters demonstrated the inevitability of compromise when two nations attempt to jointly develop a cultural product. Interferences, despite discourses of unyielding editorial control, are to be expected in this type of transaction, and the BBC had to contend with granting American partners some kind of say in programme production – even if indirectly; in fact, a better chance for interference – and thus more room to ‘shape programming for their own audiences’ –⁴⁷⁷ could be pointed as one of the reasons American partners have moved beyond off-the-shelf acquisitions in favour of co-productions. The extent of such interference seems to be tagged to the partner’s bargaining power, which in turn is directly tagged to the historical and economic scenario. As collaborations with PBS/WGBH were initiated during TV I, there was less competition and consequently less pressure; executives at the BBC, thus, could afford to reject co-production deals that did not entirely satisfy Reithian standards. As we enter the TV II era, however, advertising-supported cable channel A&E would become the BBC’s main co-production partner: aimed at an upscale niche market in America, where the business of cable was thriving, and with far more disposable income than PBS, its bargaining power was considerably higher. As it faced pressures to be more cost-effective in an increasingly cluttered market, where higher production costs were major factors at play, the BBC strived to swiftly adjust to the new scenario. Internally, the adjustments were reflected in the new

⁴⁷⁵ Alan Plater, interview, London, 10 May 2009.

⁴⁷⁶ Strover, 1995, p. 102.

⁴⁷⁷ Hazelton, 2002, p. 41.

culture championed by DGs Checkland (1987-1992) and Birt (1992-2000). Outside consultants, efficiency experts, branding specialists – along with new departments, new hierarchies and a whole new vocabulary – were steadily brought in, clearly signalling that a new direction was being taken; a direction perceived by some as part of an Orwellian regime,⁴⁷⁸ generating increasing dissatisfaction and a number of letters of resignation. Under this new efficiency regime, losing American underwriting due to artistic differences or rigid editorial control principles was a luxury the Corporation was increasingly less able to afford.

Statements like Shivas', that WGBH and A&E's notes were taken into account by the BBC merely to 'make things clearer to an international audience' and not to actually 'change them,'⁴⁷⁹ prompted the need to discuss whether 'making things clearer' to an international audience meant glossier production values, faster editing, marquee-name actors, and safer choices of content. Therefore **chapter five** looked into the growth of 'safe content' such as period drama: a reasonable way out of the art versus commerce conundrum, especially in an overly competitive period such as the 1990s. With lower cultural discount, classic serials were easier to sell than contemporary drama, while still falling into the 'high culture' programme category usually expected from public service networks or niche-oriented cable channels. Yet some BBC executives will argue that they would have been produced anyway, as part of a long public broadcasting tradition (a rather pricey tradition, as the genre is often considered one of the most expensive ones). Thus it comes as no surprise that during Birt's administration they were deemed the brand image of the BBC around the world.⁴⁸⁰ Obtaining funding outside the licence fee to produce such dramas seemed in fact most opportune. In that case, Strover's argument that co-productions are in essence an industrial response to the market – as are their choices of content and production values – seems quite accurate. Taking into consideration the general effort to make British drama look more like the 'right type'⁴⁸¹ and the emphasis laid on more 'international-market friendly' content, international audiences' preferences therefore can be said to have in fact influenced the treatment and the content of native productions - regardless of being co-produced or fully home-grown.⁴⁸² Such an influence, as Rixon points out, has more to do with surviving in a competitive market than with any form of American cultural imperialism.

⁴⁷⁸ Field, 08 June 1996.

⁴⁷⁹ Shivas, 22 October 2007.

⁴⁸⁰ Wearing, 08 October 2007.

⁴⁸¹ *Building A Global Audience: British Television In Overseas Markets*, 1999, p. 26.

⁴⁸² O'Regan, 2001, p. 309.

The BBC has been rather careful with openly promoting and publicising programmes as internationally subsidised; in Peter Clark's view, it in fact tends to be 'less honest' about it than ITV.⁴⁸³ Behind such caution inhabits a fear of appearing less committed to its public service ethos and to its licence-fee patrons. After all, although the BBC does not answer to advertisers, the American broadcasters with whom it co-produces do. Be it Mobil (in the case of *Masterpiece Theatre*) or Nestlé and Lincoln Mercury (in the case of *Pride And Prejudice*), there has always existed the risk that American corporations would be seen as having some kind of influence over BBC co-produced programmes. Although very little concrete evidence could be found of actual outside interference (with the exception of occurrences described throughout this research, e.g. Time-Life's insistence on marquee names and more American-friendly subject matters; Warner Brothers' demand for faster-paced editing in *Notorious Woman*; the addition of a number of non-existing kisses when adapting literary classics, to name a few), the possibility that such influence could in fact exist seemed enough to put the BBC in a vigilant position, enough to justify a preference for unmarked transnationalism⁴⁸⁴ and for avoiding terms like 'international co-production' in press releases and promotional materials within the UK.⁴⁸⁵ In that respect, the exception seems to be the joint projects with critically acclaimed premium cable channel HBO. The partnership, which strengthened from the 2000s onwards, appears to have been equally exploited by both sides in projects such as *Rome* and *Extras*. Different from PBS and A&E, HBO can provide better brand value and prestige to a project, to such an extent that the BBC will indeed capitalise on that, even with the risk of being criticised for it. Moreover, the BBC is usually a minor partner when co-producing with HBO; such a position, despite granting less editorial control, may secure some degree of neutrality: theoretically these are not British television programmes being financed by American dollars, they instead are top quality American programmes being produced with the help of British money. 'Quality' remains a key word here, and as for HBO, the association reinforces its 'TV above the ordinary' status. In fact its well-known slogan, 'It's not TV. It's HBO,' mirrors the very essence of Reith's principles: television that is above the much-despised 'wasteland.'⁴⁸⁶ In summary, guilt-free television; for the BBC, criticism-free co-production - or at least a better chance at it.

⁴⁸³ Peter Clark quoted in Grantham, February-March 1984, p. 38.

⁴⁸⁴ Hilmes, 2012, p. 258.

⁴⁸⁵ Wilson, 10 March 1972.

⁴⁸⁶ An essence that has also influenced PBS's 'TV Worth Watching' and A&E's 'Time Well Spent' slogans.

As we move forward into the second decade of the new millennium, it will certainly be fascinating to observe the new factors at play in the new interactive multi-platform era. With increasingly sophisticated digital technology and the multiplication of platforms to consume content, broadcasters need an increasing and steady stream of new material to show to an ever demanding audience, which could mean more internationally co-produced programmes and even more foreign-friendly content. Media convergence is bringing remarkable new developments to the broadcasting industry, as well as unique new challenges for a licence-fee funded public service. Consequently, not only international co-productions but also the international trade of UK licensed formats will become increasingly noteworthy subjects for scholarly research.

In the course of adapting to the ever-changing market and the politics that involved the trade with America, the public broadcaster was forced to come to terms with its own aptitude to be commercial, and to admit that certain aspects of its deep-rooted Reithian values, while honourable, are a product of a long gone television landscape. Such tension between an enduring culture and a survival strategy centred on productivity is described by Küng-Shankleman as an unavoidable conflict between ‘Reithianism and Birtism.’⁴⁸⁷ Therefore, if understood as strategic responses to market pressures,⁴⁸⁸ international co-productions can at times clash with the BBC’s anti-commercialism culture and public image, especially when they involve commercially aggressive American companies – a type of conflict that can in fact be traced all the way back to the 1950s (e.g. the apologetic tone of the 1955-6 Annual Report⁴⁸⁹ as it acknowledges the usefulness of US imports). Such tensions help to understand why American financial involvement was not something to be ‘trumpeted aloud;’⁴⁹⁰ hence the need to produce thoroughly elucidatory press packs and the hesitation to openly publicise the role of American dollars in the continuance of high-quality drama. This hesitation brings back an issue discussed in the first chapter: the diverging perceptions of ‘British quality’ versus ‘American chaos.’⁴⁹¹ As the British-American transnational cultural economy is characterised by both appreciation and aversion, by ‘vehement opposition on the one hand and blatant appropriation on the other,’⁴⁹² it mirrors the – often seen as – opposite poles of art versus commerce that have haunted the BBC since the early days of competition. Depending on

⁴⁸⁷ Küng-Shankleman, 2000, p. 165.

⁴⁸⁸ Stover, 1995, p. 121.

⁴⁸⁹ Lealand, 1984, p. 14.

⁴⁹⁰ Hilmes, 2012, p. 258.

⁴⁹¹ Hilmes, 2012, p. 81.

⁴⁹² Hilmes, 2012, p. 4.

American dollars may not be in total accordance with its Reithian values nor with its commitment to licence-fee paying citizens; however, neither does it entirely betray the essence of its ethos and culture, as those dollars do help to produce high-quality, educational and well-respected television programming. The fact that American partners are not so keen on financing more experimental, risky, contemporary socio-political drama, although logical from a business point of view, carries an extra weight when the public broadcaster is concerned. Even though ITV companies also have been inclined to overemphasise costume drama at the expense of more indigenous contemporary fare, the BBC is the one expected to virtuously fight for what is best for the British public.

At the core of such expectations, originated during a scarce and protected television environment, rests the Corporation's biggest challenge. As it has been gradually forced to respond to growing market pressures, it has also been forced to reassess these somewhat outdated expectations, as well as its own internal values and limitations as a public service broadcaster. The often-used discourse against partner editorial interference therefore depicts more than its role as the honourable Reithian gatekeeper of British culture. It also reflects the BBC's own struggle with the 'monastery versus brothel' dilemma; a struggle which remains intrinsic to its public broadcaster essence and which can be regarded as both its best quality and its weakest spot.

8. APPENDIXES

8.1. Appendix A:

Masterpiece Theatre: The first twenty seasons ()*

Season 1 (1971-72)		
Title	Production company	Originally produced in
<i>The First Churchills</i>	BBC	1969
<i>The Spoils Of Poynton</i>	BBC	1970
<i>The Possessed</i>	BBC	1969
<i>Pere Goriot</i>	BBC	1968
<i>Jude The Obscure</i>	BBC	1971
<i>The Gambler</i>	BBC	1968
<i>Resurrection</i>	BBC	1968
<i>Cold Comfort Farm</i>	BBC	1968
<i>The Six Wives Of Henry VIII</i>	BBC	1970
<i>Elizabeth R</i>	BBC	1971
<i>The Last Of The Mohicans</i>	BBC	1971

Season 2 (1972-73)		
<i>Vanity Fair</i>	BBC	1967
<i>Cousin Bette</i>	BBC	1971
<i>The Moonstone</i>	BBC	1972
<i>Tom Brown's School Days</i>	BBC	1971
<i>Point Counter Point</i>	BBC	1968
<i>The Golden Bowl</i>	BBC	1972

Season 3 (1973-74)		
<i>Clouds Of Witness</i>	BBC	1972
<i>The Man Who Was Hunting Himself</i>	BBC	1972
<i>The Unpleasantness At The Bellona Club</i>	BBC	1972
<i>The Little Farm (**)</i>	Granada Television	1973
<i>Upstairs, Downstairs (Season 1)</i>	London Weekend Television	1971-1975
<i>The Edwardians</i>	BBC	1972

Season 4 (1974-75)		
<i>Murder Must Advertise</i>	BBC	1973
<i>Upstairs, Downstairs (Season 2)</i>	London Weekend Television	1971-1975
<i>Country Matters (Season 1)</i>	Granada Television	1972
<i>Vienna</i>	BBC	1975
<i>The Nine Tailors</i>	BBC/ Time-Life Films	1974

Season 5 (1975-76)		
<i>Shoulder To Shoulder</i>	BBC / Warner Brothers Televi	1974
<i>Notorious Woman</i>	BBC / Warner Brothers Televi	1974
<i>Upstairs, Downstairs (Season 3)</i>	London Weekend Television	1971-1975
<i>Cakes And Ale</i>	BBC/Time-Life Films	1974
<i>Sunset Song</i>	BBC	1971

Season 6 (1976-77)		
<i>Madame Bovary</i>	BBC	1975
<i>How Green Was My Valley</i>	BBC / 20th Century Fox Telev	1975
<i>Five Red Herrings</i>	BBC	1975
<i>Upstairs, Downstairs (Season 4)</i>	London Weekend Television	1971-1975
<i>Poldark (Season 1)</i>	BBC	1975-1977

Season 7 (1977-78)		
<i>Dickens Of London</i>	Yorkshire Television	1976
<i>I, Claudius</i>	BBC	1976
<i>Anna Karenina</i>	BBC/Time-Life Films	1976
<i>Our Mutual Friend</i>	BBC	1976
<i>Poldark (Season 2)</i>	BBC	1975-1977

Season 8 (1978-79)		
<i>The Mayor Of Casterbridge</i>	BBC / Time-Life Films	1978
<i>The Duchess Of Duke Street (Season 1)</i>	BBC / Time-Life Films	1976-1977
<i>County Matters (Season 2)</i>	Granada Television	1974
<i>Lillie</i>	London Weekend Television	1978

Season 9 (1979-80)		
<i>Kean</i>	BBC	1979
<i>Love For Lydia</i>	London Weekend Television	1977
<i>The Duchess Of Duke Street (Season 2)</i>	BBC / Time-Life Films	1976-1977
<i>My Son, My Son</i>	BBC / Time-Life Films	1979
<i>Disreali</i>	ATV Associated Television	1978

Season 10 (1980-81)		
<i>Crime And Punishment</i>	BBC	1979
<i>Pride And Prejudice</i>	BBC / Australian Broadcastin	1980
<i>Testament Of Youth</i>	BBC	1979
<i>Danger UXB</i>	Thames Television	1979
<i>Thérèse Raquin</i>	BBC	1980

Season 11 (1981-82)		
<i>A Town Like Alice (***)</i>	Seven Network Australia	1981
<i>Edward And Mrs Simpson</i>	Thames Television	1978
<i>The Flame Trees Of Thika</i>	Thames Television	1981
<i>I Remember Nelson</i>	ITV Central	1982
<i>Love In A Cold Climate</i>	Thames Television	1980
<i>Flickers</i>	ATV Associated Television	1980

Season 12 (1982-83)		
<i>To Serve Them All My Days</i>	BBC / Australian Broadcasting	1980
<i>The Good Soldier</i>	Granada Television	1981
<i>Winston Churchill</i>	Southern Television	1981
<i>On Approval</i>	BBC	1982
<i>Drake's Venture</i>	Westward Television	1980
<i>Private Shultz</i>	BBC / Australian Broadcasting	1981
<i>Sons And Lovers</i>	BBC / 20th Century Fox Telev	1981

Season 13 (1983-84)		
<i>Pictures</i>	ATV Associated Television	1981
<i>The Citadel</i>	BBC/MGM Film Co.	1983
<i>The Irish R.M. ((Season 1)</i>	Ulster Television/RTE	1983-1985
<i>The Tale Of Beatrix Potter</i>	BBC	1982
<i>Nancy Astor</i>	BBC/Time-Life Films	1982

Season 14 (1984-85)		
<i>The Barchester Chronicles</i>	BBC	1982
<i>The Jewel In The Crown</i>	Granada Television	1984
<i>All For Love</i>	Granada Television	1983
<i>Strangers And Brothers</i>	BBC	1984

Season 15 (1985-86)		
<i>The Last Place On Earth</i>	ITV Central	1985
<i>Bleak House</i>	BBC/A&E	1985
<i>Lord Mountbatten: The Last Viceroy</i>	ITV	1986
<i>By The Sword Divided (Season 1)</i>	BBC	1983-1985
<i>The Irish RM (Season 2)</i>	Ulster Television/RTE	1983-1985

Season 16 (1986-87)		
<i>Paradise Postponed</i>	Thames Television	1986
<i>Goodbye Mr Chips</i>	BBC	1984
<i>Lost Empires</i>	Granada Television	1986
<i>Silas Marner</i>	BBC/A&E	1985
<i>Star Quality: Noel Coward Stories</i>	BBC	1985
<i>The Death Of the Heart</i>	Granada Television	1987
<i>Love Song</i>	Anglia Television	1985

Season 17 (1987-88)		
<i>The Bretts (Season 1)</i>	ITV Central/WGBH	1987-1989
<i>Northanger Abbey</i>	BBC/A&E	1987
<i>Sorrell & Son</i>	Yorkshire Television	1984
<i>Fortunes of War</i>	BBC/WGBH/Primetime Telev	1987
<i>Day Aftier The Fair</i>	BBC/A&E	1986
<i>David Copperfield</i>	BBC	1986
<i>By The Sword Divided (Season 2)</i>	BBC	1983-1985

Season 18 (1988-89)		
<i>A Perfect Spy</i>	BBC/A&E	1987
<i>Heaven On Earth</i>	BBC/CBC	1987
<i>A Wreath Of Roses</i>	Granada Television	1987
<i>A Very British Coup</i>	Channel 4	1988
<i>All Passion Spent</i>	BBC	1986
<i>Talking Heads: Bed Among The Lentils</i>	BBC	1988
<i>Christabel</i>	BBC/A&E	1988
<i>The Charmer</i>	London Weekend Television	1987
<i>The Bretts (Season 2)</i>	ITV Central/WGBH	1987-1989

Season 19 (1989-90)		
<i>And A Nightingale Sang</i>	ITV	1989
<i>Precious Bane</i>	BBC/WGBH	1989
<i>Glory Enough For All</i>	CBC	1988
<i>A Tale Of Two Cities</i>	Granada Television	1989
<i>The Yellow Wallpaper</i>	BBC	1989
<i>After The War</i>	Granada Television	1989
<i>The Real Charlotte</i>	Granada Television	1990
<i>The Dressmaker</i>	Channel 4	1988
<i>Traffik</i>	Channel 4	1989
<i>Piece Of Cake</i>	London Weekend Television	1988

Season 20 (1990-91)		
<i>The Heat Of the Day</i>	Granada Television	1989
<i>The Ginger Tree</i>	BBC/NHK/WGBH	1989
<i>Jeeves & Wooster (Season 1)</i>	Granada Television	1990-1993
<i>Scoop</i>	London Weekend Television	1987
<i>A Room Of One's Own</i>	Thames Television	1991
<i>House Of Cards</i>	BBC	1990
<i>The Shiralee</i>	South Australian Film Commi	1987
<i>Summer's Lease</i>	BBC/ABC/Television New Ze	1989

(*) BBC co-produced programmes are highlighted

(**) First non-BBC programme aired in *Masterpiece Theatre*

(***) First non-British programme aired in *Masterpiece Theatre*

Sources: BFI National Archive (London), Paley Center for Media (New York), Giddings and Selby (2001), Vitiello (1991), IMDB (www.imdb.com), PBS website

(www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/archive/programs.html)

8.2. Appendix B:

BBC drama co-productions between 1973-1985 not broadcast in *Masterpiece Theatre*

Title	Production company	Originally produced in
<i>War And Peace</i>	BBC / Time-Life Films	1973
<i>David Copperfield</i>	BBC / Time-Life Films	1974
<i>The Pallisers</i>	BBC / Time-Life Films	1974
<i>Marie Curie</i>	BBC / Time-Life Films	1977
<i>The Devil's Crown</i>	BBC / Time-Life Films	1978
<i>Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy</i>	BBC / Paramount	1979
<i>My Son, My Son</i>	BBC / Time-Life Films	1979
<i>BBC Television Shakespeare Series:</i> <i>As You Like It</i> <i>Richard II</i> <i>Romeo And Juliet</i> <i>Henry V</i> <i>Henry IV</i> <i>Henry VIII</i> <i>Measure For Measure</i> <i>Julius Caesar</i> <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> <i>Hamlet</i> <i>The Tempest</i> <i>Twelfth Night</i> <i>The Winter's Tale</i> <i>All's Well That Ends Well</i> <i>The Merry Wives Of Windsor</i> <i>The Two Gentlemen Of Verona</i> <i>The Tragedy Of Richard III</i> <i>Coriolanus</i> <i>The Life And Death Of King John</i> <i>Love's Labour's Lost</i>	BBC / Time-Life Films	1978-1985
<i>Caught On A Train</i>	BBC / Time-Life Films	1980
<i>The Borgias</i>	BBC / Time-Life Films	1981
<i>Smiley's People</i>	BBC / Paramount	1982
<i>Mansfield Park</i>	BBC / Lionheart Television International	1983
<i>Tender Is The Night</i>	BBC / Showtime	1985
<i>Edge Of Darkness</i>	BBC / Lionheart Television International	1985

Sources: BFI National Archive (London), Scott (1976), Giddings and Selby (2001), IMDB (www.imdb.com), PBS website (www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/archive/programs.html)

8.3. Appendix C

BBC drama co-productions with Arts and Entertainment Network in the 1990s

Title	Originally produced in
<i>Miss Marple</i>	1984-1992
<i>Silas Marner</i> (*)	1985
<i>Bleak House</i> (*)	1985
<i>Day After The Fair</i> (*)	1986
<i>Northanger Abbey</i> (*)	1987
<i>A Perfect Spy</i> (*)	1987
<i>Christabel</i>	1988
<i>The Green Man</i>	1990
<i>The House Of Elliot (season 1)</i>	1991
<i>Pride And Prejudice</i> (*)	1995
<i>Silent Witness (season 1)</i>	1996
<i>Tom Jones</i>	1997
<i>Ivanhoe</i>	1997
<i>Vanity Fair</i>	1998

(*) Also aired on *Masterpiece Theatre*

Sources: BFI Film & TV Database, Scott (1976), Giddings and Selby (2001).

8.4. Appendix D

List of interviews and questions:

Alan Plater	
Short bio	Playwright, member of the BBC's General Advisory Council during the 1970s; also responsible for adapting to the small screen <i>The Barchester Chronicles</i> (1982) and the UK-US co-production <i>Fortunes Of War</i> (1987), both for the BBC.
Date	10 May 2009
Type	Email
Questions	<p>1) I have recently come across, at the BBC Archives, a 1979 document called <i>The BBC and Co-production: A Personal Note</i>, addressed to the General Advisory Council and signed by you. I would love to hear your thoughts on the following paragraphs, which you wrote thirty years ago:</p> <p>'Co-production is simultaneously exhilarating in its possibilities and alarming in its implications: very much like life, you might say.'</p> <p>'Perhaps we could use a little more commercial buccaneering in the financing and world exploitation of our own programmes. Just as ITV could use the occasional Reithian injection, maybe we could use an occasional touch of the Grades'</p> <p>2) Regarding your adaptation of <i>Fortunes of War</i> for television in 1987: How was your experience working with an American co-production partner like WGBH? How much more challenging would you say it is to adapt a work with two distinct audiences - British and American - in mind?</p>

Jonathan Powell	
Short bio	BBC Head of Drama (1985-1987), Controller BBC1 (1987-1992). Oversaw a number of co-productions with America: <i>Bleak House</i> (1985), <i>Tender Is The Night</i> (1985), <i>Fortunes Of War</i> (1986), <i>Northanger Abbey</i> (1987).
Date	17 September 2007
Type	In person
Questions	<p>1) Some critics have argued that the intense economical pressures the BBC was under from the 1980s onwards were responsible for its redirecting sales efforts to overseas markets - mostly the American. Do you believe that to be true?</p> <p>2) The BBC is known for its reluctance in sharing creative and editorial control. In practical terms, how much influence did companies like WGBH, Mobil and A&E have over script and casting of a joint project?</p>

	<p>3) In the closing credits of a programme, what is the difference between ‘produced in association with WGBH’ and ‘a BBC/WGBH co-production’? Is there a legal issue?</p> <p>4) Major BBC dramas like <i>House of Elliot</i> and <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> were hardly ever publicised in the UK as co-productions with America. Was that a strategic decision? Such approach seems to be different when it comes to HBO co-productions, would you agree?</p>
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Mark Shivas	
Short bio	BBC Head of Drama (1987-1993). List of programmes include: <i>Northanger Abbey</i> (1987), <i>Summer’s Lease</i> (1989) and <i>House Of Elliot</i> (1991-94).
Date	22 October 2007
Type	Email
Questions	<p>1) Some critics have argued that the intense economical pressures the BBC was under from the 1980s onwards were responsible for its redirecting sales efforts to overseas markets - mostly the American. Do you believe that to be true? Would you say that if given the chance British audiences would rather see more British contemporary drama on their screens than another remake of Dickens or Austen?</p> <p>2) In order to justify its licence fee, the BBC needs to maintain its commitment to British audiences; however, on the other hand, in order to justify the dollars helping to fund high-profile drama, it also has to make them appealing to audiences in America. If the licence fee is believed to keep the BBC free of commercial pressures, then what happens when the Corporation needs to also cater for audiences on the other side of the Atlantic?</p> <p>3) In practical terms, how much influence did companies like WGBH, Mobil and A&E have over script and casting of a joint project?</p>

Michael Wearing	
Short bio	BBC Head of Serials (1989-1998). Has produced <i>Boys From The Blackstuff</i> (1982), <i>Edge Of Darkness</i> (1985), <i>Middlemarch</i> (1994), <i>Pride And Prejudice</i> (1995) and <i>Our Friends In The North</i> (1996).
Date	8 October 2007
Type	In person
Questions	<p>1) Some critics have argued that the intense economical pressures the BBC was under from the 1980s onwards were responsible for its redirecting sales efforts to overseas markets. What is your view on that?</p> <p>2) The BBC is known for its reluctance in sharing creative and editorial control. In practical terms, how much influence did companies like WGBH and Mobil have over script and casting of a joint project?</p>

	<p>3) Major BBC dramas like <i>House of Elliot</i> and <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> were hardly ever publicised in the UK as co-productions with America. Was that a strategic decision?</p> <p>4) The press repeatedly mentioned how unhappy you were with John Birth's administration at the time and with how commercial the BBC was becoming. How much of that is true?</p> <p>5) What is your opinion on the current state of British drama? Do you believe high budget drama cannot exist without overseas money?</p> <p>6) When did the BBC actually ditch Time-Life Films as an US distributor? The contract was renewed in 1979, but surely there was an intention of using BBC Enterprises in the near future?</p>
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John Willis	
Short bio	WGBH VP of National Programming (2002- 2003), and subsequently BBC Director of Factual and Learning (2003).
Date	17 September 2007
Type	Email
Questions	<p>1) Some critics have argued that the intense economical pressures the BBC was under from the 1980s onwards were responsible for its redirecting sales efforts to overseas markets - mostly the American. Do you believe that to be true? Would you say that if given the chance British audiences would rather see more British contemporary drama on their screens than another remake of Dickens or Austen?</p> <p>2) In order to justify its licence fee, the BBC needs to maintain its commitment to British audiences; however, on the other hand, in order to justify the dollars helping to fund high-profile drama, it also has to make them appealing to audiences in America. If the licence fee is believed to keep the BBC free of commercial pressures, then what happens when the Corporation needs to also cater for audiences on the other side of the Atlantic?</p> <p>3) The BBC is known for its reluctance in sharing creative and editorial control. In practical terms, how much influence did companies like WGBH, Mobil and A&E have over script and casting of a joint project? And how much of the BBC's reputation for not allowing editorial interference is actually true?</p>

8.5. Appendix E

TV History: A Brief Overview ⁴⁹³

TV I (1930s-1960/70s)	TV II (1970/80s-1990s)	TV III (1990s-)
Scarcity	Availability	Plenty
State control	Deregulation	Market-driven
Broadcasting	Narrowcasting	Niche programming
Limited terrestrial channels	Cable and satellite	Multichannel
National	National/international	Global
Analogue/black and white	Analogue/colour	Digital/HDTV
Live	Video	DVD
Passive viewers	Mass viewers	Interactive viewers
Restricted broadcasting	Rigid schedules	Do-it-yourself scheduling
Experimentation	Golden Age	Debates around quality

⁴⁹³ As presented by Medhurst, 2006, p. 123.

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