

**Watching the box of delights: production,
site and style in British school-age children's
television fantasy drama, 1950-1994**

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

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This thesis examines the uses and purpose of the fantastic in British children's television between 1950 and 1994. While telefantasy for primetime schedules has been mapped out by Catherine Johnson, no such study has been attempted for children's television drama, primarily due to the academic and institutional marginalisation which has traditionally afflicted children's television.¹ This thesis attempts to address this gap in research by recovering a history of children's television fantasy across the regulated duopoly within the twentieth century. Using archival research drawn from the BBC Written Archive Centre and the ITA/IBA Archive at the University of Bournemouth together with institutional histories and textual analysis, it argues that fantasy has throughout the history of British children's television been a consistent and potent presence within the schedules. It suggests that the use of fantasy within production cultures of children's television responds reflexively to the conception of the child audience as constructed through historical ideas of child development, public service requirements and the individual's role within a democratic society.

'Television drama matters,' states George Brandt, but as a matter of course children's drama has been overlooked in favour of 'serious' drama intended for adult schedules.² Where genre in television has been addressed, it has tended towards the

¹ Catherine Johnson, *Telefantasy* (London: BFI, 2006)

² George W. Brandt, 'Introduction' in *British Television Drama*, ed. George W. Brandt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 35

study of cult television. Using case studies of children's fantasy drama from the BBC and ITV companies, both Majors and Regionals, this research works towards reassessing fantasy drama for children not as exceptional productions but as part of a dialectic of drama. Operating in parallel with mimetic drama, the mode and aesthetic of fantasy drama was deployed as part of an ongoing but historically positioned discourse that negotiated changing theorisations of the child audience, industrial and institutional imperatives, and social and cultural paradigms.

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Abbreviations

BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation

BAC – British Action for Children's Television

CAC – Children's Advisory Council (ITA)

CQT – Campaign for Quality Television

GAC- General Advisory Council

IBA – Independent Broadcasting Authority

ITA – Independent Television Authority

ITC – Independent Television Commission

ITCA – Independent Television Companies' Association

ITV – Independent Television

NCSC – Network Children's Subcommittee

Declaration

I hereby declare that the following thesis is solely my own work, and that this thesis has not been submitted for a degree, either in the same or different form, to this or any other University. Earlier versions of sections of this thesis have been published in the following articles:

Style, Space And Seriality In Early Children's Television
Drama: *Puck Of Pook's Hill*, *Five Children and It* (BBC, 1951)
and *Man In Armour* (1951–1954)
Victoria Byard
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'I belong to the future': timeslip drama as history production in
The Georgian House (HTV West, 1976) and A Traveler in Time
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Victoria Byard
Forthcoming Time Travel in Media edited collection

Chapter One: Children's Television Fantasy Drama, 1950-1994

Introduction

In Plato's *The Republic*, his 'ideal state [...] banned imaginative literature for corrupting the young'.³ Plato argued that although stories were an essential part of children's education, anything that departed from the consensus reality, such as shapeshifting, illusion, or other worlds, in the new city-state would cause them to confuse reality with fiction and deviate from intended pedagogies. Storytelling and drama, Plato argued, would make children cowardly, duplicitous and morally weak; in short, bad citizens. Thus, he recommended not only the exclusion of poets from his ideal city-state but also the exclusion of previous acclaimed imaginative literature by Homer and Hesiod.

Several centuries later, imaginative stories would begin children's broadcasting at the BBC; the first radio broadcast 'just for the children', by A.E. Thompson, was 'a story of Spick and Span, two dwarfs, and [...] a gramophone record called *Dance of the Goblins*'.⁴ Throughout the history of British broadcasting for children, stories of magic, other worlds, and time travel continued to entertain and enthrall children, but, as this thesis will argue, also constituted part of a deliberately fostered cultural and institutional discourse of fantasy, education and citizenship within British children's television. Drama of the fantastic was construed not only as an essential element for the purposes of entertainment, but as an ideal mode

³ Sonia Livingstone 'Half A Century Of Television In The Lives Of Our Children'. *The Annals Of The American Academy Of Political And Social Science* 625(1) (2009): 151-163. doi:10.1177/0002716209338572. (accessed January 1, 2016)

⁴ 'From Muffin the Mule to In the Night Garden and beyond', BBC (accessed January 1, 2016) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/legacy/aboutthebbc/2012/02/from-muffin-the-mule-to-in-the.shtml>

with which to shape the future generation. The fantastic could be used in children's drama in multifarious ways for the child audience as science fiction, allegory, myth, fairy story, ghost story, literary adaptation or non-naturalistic drama, but the uses and pleasures for broadcasters were just as varied and powerful. This thesis argues that the use of the fantastic in children's television drama across forty years of the regulated duopoly responds to imperatives of the public service broadcasting model, the institutional constructions of the child audience and the producers' own ambitions and aesthetic preferences. Within British children's television, its mode, aesthetic and form came to constitute part of the 'balance' of British children's television, the 'mixed economy'⁵ which made it a 'service in microcosm'⁶. This thesis therefore argues that fantasy drama became constitutive of the 'balance' of child development and by corollary part of British childhood.

As a result, haunted houses; ghosts from past and future; other worlds; monsters; ink thieves; a demon headmaster; a boy who turns into a dog; talking lions and walking trees; a race of tiny people who live behind the skirting boards; a box of delights; alien invasions defeated by children and King Arthur; a garden out of time: all of these and more created specific modes, aesthetics and as I will suggest ideologies of fantasy television drama made for children in 20th-century Britain. These modes, aesthetics and ideologies were part of a flourishing and particularized production culture of drama for children, which developed throughout the latter half of the twentieth century as part of the discourse of public service broadcasting in Britain. Maire Messenger Davies writes: 'Children's drama has a long history in British broadcasting, both in the BBC and ITV, and is

⁵ David Buckingham et al *Children's Television in Britain* (London: BFI, 1999), 52

⁶ BBC WAC T16/45/1 'Mr [Richmond] Postgate's Talk on Television Children's Programmes Transcript' Copy sent to Tel.P.O. July 26th 1950

linked with a belief in the importance of story-telling. Children's drama includes genres that are not found in other parts of the schedules.⁷ Fantasy drama was, in part, one of these child-specific genres. Yet despite the genre's pervasiveness, distinctive visual style, often difficult content, and what both producers and academics have described as its particular suitability for children's media, there has as yet been no sustained examination of the operation of fantasy within children's public service broadcasting as an industrial, cultural and developmental mode and form.

This thesis attempts to rectify this gap in research by mapping the deployment of the fantastic within children's television drama across the regulated duopoly between the years of 1950 and 1994. This period describes the period between the establishment of a specialized children's department within the BBC and the introduction of ITV in 1955, and draws to a close following the introduction of new commercialized drives in the BBC and the deregulation of ITV company production and ownership from the early 1990s. Children's programming was broadcast on BBC television from 1946,⁸ but only became the specialized and daily service as which it still persists (albeit on digital channels) from 1950 when the Children's Programmes department was established. Five years later, its dominance would be challenged by the start of Independent Television broadcasting, which reformulated children's television into a competitive and commercially-inflected discourse and schedule. This state of comfortable competition would continue for the best part of forty years, until the effects of the 1990 Broadcasting Act so significantly altered the terms of public service broadcasting in Britain that the production of children's

⁷ Maire Messenger Davies and Kate O'Malley *Children and Television Drama: A Review of the Literature* (Unpublished Report to the BBC, London: London College of Printing, 1996), 13

⁸ Buckingham et al, *Children's Television in Britain*, 17

television by the BBC and ITV companies was changed and, arguably, diminished both qualitatively and quantitatively, in perpetuity. As this thesis will show, fantasy drama was present in these schedules from the outset and functioned within the discourse of children's television production throughout its history in various historically situated ways: as part of a model of early drama and spectacle, as a reflection and promotion of social change,⁹ as part of an epistemological and democratic framework, and as part of the natural cognitive, emotional and ontological development of the child viewer.

The research lacunae within children's television is activated by the marginalization of children's television as a service, as text, form and aesthetic; in short, as television history. Rather, the history of research in children's television has centred almost obsessively upon the *effects* of television on children.

Consequently, it became conflated with the recurrent moral panics that accompanied the rise of television as a domestic medium, although the two were not necessarily correlative. In the early years of television, concerns about television's effects were primarily psychological: often described in terms of a narcotic, television was held to create child 'addicts', whose minds would degrade followed by their physique and their moral fibre. David Oswell quoted Monica Dickens on the clear and present danger of television in the 1950s: 'In America, they're getting really scared of television. Doctors are saying that the children's health is suffering because they spend too long indoors.' Dickens also cited television's damaging effects on education and family life, and Oswell goes on to rather gleefully list the various medical problems that were held to result from indiscriminate television viewing in the 1950s: damage to eyesight, 'jaw displacement', and viewing posture

⁹ Janet Thumim *Inventing Television Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1

which could ‘make [children’s] faces misshapen’.¹⁰

In 1958, Himmelweit’s Nuffield Report, *Television and the Child*, reiterated this pathologisation of heavy television viewing, suggesting however that television was not the cause of addiction but rather the symptom of a social malaise, providing comfort to the ‘isolated child, the insecure child, the delinquent child, the maladjusted child and the “dull” child’.¹¹ Twenty years later, Marie Winn continued the pathologisation of the relationship between children and television in *The Plug-In Drug*, and Neil Postman even suggested that television has been the defining factor in the ‘disappearance of childhood’. This conception of the television as addictive or morally and culturally disintegrative for children has persisted to the near exclusion of any research on children’s television as a cultural discourse. It has, in addition, been historically regarded, even by its own institutions as a marginal production culture and service due to its small returns in both ratings and profits. In 1953, Freda Lingstrom, then Head of BBC Children’s Programmes, called for ‘a change of heart towards children’s productions. It is not so much an “attitude” as an “atmosphere” which pervades the whole service – an atmosphere which is best summed up by the [...] most frequently heard comment; “It’s only children.”’¹² This ‘paedophobia’¹³ arguably persisted at several levels across British broadcasting as a landscape and within its institutions. While Channel 4 was originally established with a mandate to produce a varied schedule, it rapidly became apparent that a children’s service was unlikely to be part of it. The restricted broadcasting hours at its inception meant that the child audience was largely unavailable to them, and was besides both fickle

¹⁰ David Oswell, ‘And what might our children become? Future visions, governance and the child television audience in postwar Britain’ *Screen* (1999) 40 (1): 66-87 doi:10.1093/screen/40.1.66, 71

¹¹ David Oswell, ‘And what might our children become?’, 80

¹² BBC WAC T16/45/1 ‘Children and Commercial Television’ H.C.P.Tel. to D.Tel.B., December 17th 1953

¹³ BBC WAC File R73/525/1 ‘Oral History Project: Owen Reed’

and unrewarding. The channel's output for children was therefore uneven and arguably was more akin to the 'youth television,' which was emerging at that time.¹⁴ Channel 4 would later dispense altogether with the polite fiction that they were producing children's television, axing their Children's Programmes Commissioning Editor in 1988¹⁵ and subsequently developing their 'children's' programming by importing glossy, teen-oriented drama from the U.S. Even within some of the ITV companies, economic and philosophical imperatives took precedence over the provision of a children's service and consequently programmes were produced as 'kidult' or family texts rather than child-oriented.¹⁶ Some of these programmes, such as the Gerry Anderson Supermarionation output, were so explicitly marketed to families through publicity and scheduling that they have been excluded from this thesis, as not meeting the BBC definition of children's programmes: made specifically for children and broadcast with recognized children's schedules.

Further to its industrial and academic relegation as the Cinderella service, children's television is further elided from view by the endemic problems within the study of television history as a whole. John Ellis notes the difficulty of developing what could be called a television canon in the absence of extant audio-visual material, caused by the prevalence of live transmission in the 1950s and the institutional practice of wiping videotapes, a practice which persisted up until the 1980s.¹⁷ Jonathan Bignell also works through the concept of television canons as 'an argument about the stakes and consequences of the process of canonization', suggesting that 'tensions in historiography' between texts selected for canon

¹⁴ Karen Lury, *British Youth Television: Cynicism and Enchantment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001)

¹⁵ Maggie Brown 'Grade cuts children's slot from Channel 4' *The Independent* March 7th 1988, 5

¹⁶ 'Elkan Allan 'Teleview: They Kid You Not' *The Times* December 5th 1981, 12

¹⁷ John Ellis, 'Is it possible to construct a canon of television programmes?' in *Re-Viewing Television History* ed. Helen Wheatley (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 15-27

formation as the relay to an ‘absent history’ and those which are chosen rather for their theoretical productiveness.¹⁸ British television history as a whole has suffered by both the early assumption that television was an ‘ephemeral art’¹⁹, or more prosaically ‘moving wallpaper’. While early productions inevitably could not be retrieved due to live transmission and lack of telerecording facilities, even productions made after 1958 when videotape was first introduced to British broadcasting have been lost forever due to wiping and junking. Further losses to television history have been the archives and production files of ITV companies, often thrown into rubbish skips when the franchise was lost or disappearing into the depths of the ITV organisation.

This lack of material has privileged some forms and genres of television at the expense of others, not least of children’s television, already overlooked institutionally as a ‘charity adjunct’²⁰. Johnson and Turnock, in their examination of the methodological problems of researching ITV history note the lack of research on children’s television.²¹ John Corner²² and Maire Messenger Davies agree with Johnson and Turnock’s identification of the academic and institutional disregard which has affected children’s television specifically. None of them offer a reason for this lack, although Davies also points out the overwhelming attention paid to children’s television by the press, an imbalance which she notes has meant that ‘the debate around children’s place in the ecology of broadcasting has often been ill-informed and emotive.’²³ Consider Conservative Minister Michael Fallon’s assertion to the press in 1991 that

¹⁸ Jonathan Bignell, ‘Citing the Classics: Constructing British television drama history in publishing and pedagogy’ in *Re-Viewing Television History* (ed. Helen Wheatley), 27-40

¹⁹ T.C. Worsley, *Television: the Ephemeral Art*

²⁰ BBC WAC T16/45/1 H.C.P.Tel. to D.Tel. B. December 17th 1953

²¹ Catherine Johnson and Rob Turnock *ITV Cultures* (Maidenhead: Open University Press), 8

²² John Corner, *Popular Television in Britain* (London: BFI, 1991)

²³ Davies and O’Malley *Children and Television Drama*, 23

British children's television was 'wicked, brazen and sinister'!²⁴ In this discourse of marginalization, children's television drama also comes in for short shrift, both academically and industrially despite Anna Home's assertion that drama for children is just as complex, expensive and aesthetically developed as drama for the primetime schedules. Davies rather despairingly locates this lack of research within the general apathy towards children's media: 'This lack of recognition of children's drama as part of the great TV drama tradition, is part of a general critical tradition which does not take seriously material specifically labelled as aimed at children.'²⁵ Working against this academic research gap and widespread cultural and industrial marginalization of children's television, then, this thesis will recover a history of children's television fantasy drama from 1950 to the mid-1990s. It will demonstrate that contrary to popular perception, fantasy has been part of the discourse of British children's television across the regulated duopoly from the earliest days of television.

Historically and institutionally, children's fantasy drama has been used to respond to what were seen as the needs of the 'child audience', whether as a conduit of culture and didacticism through literary adaptations or as an analogue for children's imagination and play as part of their emotional and cognitive development. Fantasy drama has however also been employed to meet multifarious and often ostensibly conflicting imperatives that affect media within 20th-century Britain. The fantastic could be used to approach a multiplicity of institutional requirements and anxieties: the need for 'high culture' as part of the BBC remit in *Puck of Pook's Hill*, anxieties about 1960s' counter culture in Granada's *The Owl Service*, about the

²⁴ Anna Home *Into the Box of Delights* (London: BBC Books, 1993), 9

²⁵ Maire Messenger Davies *Dear BBC : Children, Television Storytelling, and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 57

influence of the media itself (*S.W.A.L.K.*), second wave feminism and female independence (*Shadow of the Stone*), or the British class system and its oppressions (*King of the Castle*) among others. Such real-world issues are potentially contentious issues to be raised within children's television, which has always been monitored (and chastised) for inappropriate material. From murder plays in children's hour to the Teletubbies, parents, teachers and politicians have always had something to say about what belongs in children's television, regardless of whether or not they have watched it themselves. One incisive press article from 1960 noted wryly, 'Children's television is hag-ridden by objecting adults, whose insight into and understanding of the young often seems to leave a lot to be desired.'²⁶

Thus, the fantastic mode can be argued to be a 'safe', or at least safer, mode with which to approach social and cultural anxieties, Jowett and Abbott suggesting that "'serious" social issues were often negotiated through fantasy genres such as science fiction and horror'.²⁷ Cook and Wright concur, stating in their introduction to *British Science Fiction Television* that '[b]ecause of its displacement of social, political and technological concerns on to an outlandish, imaginative plane, British science fiction TV could often be more freely truthful about those concerns than any number of news broadcasts or current affairs analyses of the period could ever be, precisely because of the very indirectness of its metaphorical approach'.²⁸ Therefore the fantastic was a mode that could work synergistically with the didactic underpinnings of children

²⁶ From a Correspondent 'What Children want from television is the informative and vivid' *The Times* May 12th 1960, 10

²⁷ Lorna Jowett and Stacey Abbott *TV Horror: Investigating the Dark Side of the Small Screen* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 2

²⁸ John R. Cook and Peter Wright, 'Introduction' in *British Science Fiction Television: A Hitchhiker's Guide* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 3

television and contemporary anxieties about childhood, culture and politics at, arguably, an aesthetic and cognitive remove.

However, the ability of the fantastic to work as a masking or allegorical mode in presenting controversial or troubling material is, I argue, only one of its aspects. The use of the fantastic in children's drama also exposes the ontological and epistemological questions at the heart of television for children and its production of fiction in particular: what is children's television and how is it differentiated from television for adults? How do children understand television as a medium and as a technology? How are their perceptions of reality affected by the operation of television as a medium which produces both 'reality' and fiction, and which often and increasingly complicates boundaries between the two? How does the development of literacy, both in media and literature, affect children's perception of any given text? While these questions are relevant to any media for children, nowhere are they more acute than in children's television fantasy drama, which can upset, enrich and expand children's boundaries, not merely through the message but the medium itself.

In focusing upon the cognitive and civic potentialities of children's television fantasy, it is possible to run the risk of overlooking several equally important aspects: its affective and aesthetic appeal. The sense of wonder, the 'arresting strangeness'²⁹, so often cited in the appeal of literary speculative fiction, is within children's fantasy drama made televisual. Part of this wonder may be theorized as purely emotional, yet it may also function as a distancing technique in order to reincorporate the fantasy drama into a schedule which prioritized children's intellectual and social development

²⁹ J.R.R. Tolkien, 'On Fairy Stories' in *Tree and Leaf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 48

without necessarily being directly educative. Therefore, *The Changes*, as Peter Wright documents, was in the 1970s a working through of race relations and multiculturalism.³⁰ Similarly, *The Georgian House* exposed hidden histories of Bristol and the slave trade as an exploration of contemporary racist structures.³¹ Fantasy was useful as a way not only of describing a space of entertainment associated primarily with children, but of approaching contentious material and making the material of subject formation, acculturation and citizenship part of contemporary childhood. As Davies writes:

The testing of the bounds of reality, as in fantasy drama, makes it easier for children to reflect on alternative modes of existence, compared to the realities of life as it is lived. In doing so, they are able to compare these alternative modes with the realities of their own experiences and to understand the forces shaping these experiences. The true 'uses of enchantment' begin to become apparent in such reflection'.³²

Davies found however that fantasy was also a genre that appealed to children as fantasy, in and of itself. During the course of Davies' direct research with schoolchildren, 'one 11-year-old girl from a village primary school in Buckinghamshire eloquently argued: Children don't just want to watch what is real they want fantasy, they don't just want to watch what happens every day - they know what happens because they see it in their own home - they want to see something that is really

³⁰ Peter Wright, (2013) A Condition of England: The critique of racism, sexism and the 'back to nature' movement in the BBC's adaptation of Peter Dickinson's 'The Changes' novels. *Science Fiction Film and Television*, 6 (2), 253-279

³¹ Victoria Byard, 'I belong to the future': timeslip drama as history production in *The Georgian House* (HTV West, 1976) and *A Traveller in Time* (BBC, 1978)' in *Time Travel in Popular Media: Essays on Film, Television, Literature and Video Games* ed. Matthew Potter & Joan Ormrod (London: McFarland, 2015)

³² Davies *Dear BBC*, 95

unbelievable.³³ Child viewers, then, seem to be drawn towards television drama as a conduit for ‘arresting strangeness’; television drama is equally capable of offering the escape and enchantment that Tolkien and Bettelheim find within fairy stories and fantasy literature.

The use of fantasy as a particularized genre for children also indicates the care taken by public service broadcasters that the audience should be regarded as both developmental and arguably vulnerable, and not expected to learn through unadorned and potentially brutal realism. In this way, the child’s development is not merely being addressed through the developmental schedule, although the comprehension of drama as fictive is linked to cognitive development, but through genre. Fantasy drama may respond to children’s emotional development as much as intellectual development. In this way, it may operate in similar fashion to another mode as identified by Lynn Whitaker: ‘Laughter is held up almost as a defining marker of childhood and a positive indication that the child is not —being forced to grow up [too] quickly’: a construction of the child that David Elkind has famously theorised as *The Hurried Child* (2007).³⁴ Fantasy, as a genre that requires the imaginative work to reconcile it with real life and one moreover that is often linked with child-centred activities such as play, is, I argue, another defining marker of contemporary constructions of childhood reflected and produced through television.

Thus, I will argue that, far from being a marginal or tangential genre, fantasy within children’s television in actuality functions as part of its ethos, its conception of the child audience, and the balance which was for so long a key feature of the regulated

³³ Davies *Dear BBC*, 95

³⁴ Lynn Whitaker, *Producing UK children's public service broadcasting in the 21st century: a case study of BBC Scotland*. PhD thesis, University of Glasgow [<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/3012/1/2011WhitakerPhD.pdf>] (accessed Sept 27th 2014)

duopoly. The fantastic was consistently present within children's television drama from its inception, as part of an approach to British public service broadcasting which recognises fantasy as an essential part of learning, subject-formation and citizenship processes and discourses. It was also consistently useful to broadcasters as a form, mode and aesthetic which could negotiate contested spaces and even reconcile conflicting imperatives at different times within the British broadcasting model. I argue that television fantasy is a recognised and vital part of the children's schedules, and often the production ecologies and cultures, of the regulated duopoly in the 20th-century. As part of the oft-cited 'balance' within children's television, between factual and fiction programmes, education and entertainment, home-originated and imported material, there was also a recognised balance to be maintained, although not always successfully, between mimetic drama and fantastic drama, creating an institutional and cultural dialectic within children's television drama.

Definitions

‘The child audience’: Ien Ang’s influential audience study suggests that all ‘television audiences remain difficult to define, attract and keep’³⁵; John Hartley went even further in describing the audience as an ‘invisible fiction’, created by broadcasters and researchers.³⁶ Buckingham and Davies reject this conception while recognizing that the audience as constructed by both bodies is inherently problematic and difficult to reach. Both recognize that different and often overlapping, ‘sedimented’, historical constructions of the child audience have inflected the production and policy of children’s television throughout the last sixty years.³⁷

‘Children’s programmes’: both ITV and the BBC wrangle over these internally for several decades, although perhaps unsurprisingly the frequency of these debates increases in the 1980s when the spaces of public service and quality started to become contested. In 1987, assistant Head of BBC Children’s, Roy Thompson declared at a Steering Committee meeting that ‘his definition was a programme made or scheduled by the Children’s Programmes Department.’³⁸ This is clearly a definition that would not stand up for the ITV programmes, which were often not made by children’s programmes departments and were scheduled by a Network Committee. For the purposes of this thesis, children’s programmes refer to any programmes produced for broadcast during recognized children’s schedules, common to both the BBC and ITV: after-school weekday schedules and the contested Sunday afternoon

³⁵ Ien Ang *Desperately Seeking An Audience* (London: Routledge, 1991), ix

³⁶ John Hartley ‘Invisible fictions: Television audiences, paedocracy, pleasure’ in *Textual Practice* 1(2):121–38 and *Tele-Ology* (London: Routledge, 1992)

³⁷ Buckingham *Children’s Television in Britain*, 149, and Davies *Dear BBC*, 2

³⁸ B213-002 Children’s Programmes General Part 1 08/10/68- 31/12/90 ‘Steering Committee minutes’ November 11th 1987

slot. There are exceptions such as the BBC weekday drama produced by the Drama Group between 1963 and 1970, and Sunday serials between 1963 and 1988, but these very rarely, if ever, qualified as television fantasy and therefore do not fall under the remit of this thesis.

‘Public service broadcasting’: Although liberally invoked in any debate about British broadcasting, this term likewise lacked any definition institutionally but Tracey locates its values ‘[i]n constitutional terms’, through the 1981 Broadcasting Act which ‘required that commercial broadcasting should be conducted as a public service by a public authority set up for the purpose to disseminate programmes of information, education, and entertainment, of a high technical standard with a proper balance and range in their subject matter.’³⁹ The instruction to inform, educate and entertain was also part of the BBC’s Charter from an early stage, and came to typify the Reithian ethos of the Corporation. Despite PSB’s slippery construction, public service was, and is, nevertheless invoked for a variety of reasons, both adverse and positive.

³⁹ Michael Tracey, *The Decline and Fall of Public Service Broadcasting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 20-21

Literature Review

The lack of research around children's fantasy drama is also indexical of the lack of research into children's drama as a whole, and the marginalization of fantasy as a genre across media. As a result, the literature review necessarily draws from adjacent discourses to suggest a way into the thesis topic.

Literature is organised thematically into the history of British children's television, the use of realism and fantasy in media, the function of fantasy in children's television, fantasy drama as an institutional strategy, and, perhaps most importantly, historicised constructions of the child audience and its developmental ability to read fantasy, reality, and media. Consequently, the literature review synthesises research from multiple fields to theorise how the fantastic might operate within children's drama at the level of production, reception and text, and how it operates specifically within the selected case studies.

Children's Television History

Television history as a research field has, as noted, not paid much attention to children's television, preferring instead to focus on genres produced for the evening schedules, valorized by associations of culture, exceptionalism and art. Jason Jacobs's seminal work *The Intimate Screen* focused on early 'serious' drama, almost inevitably given the persistent high culture, Reithian approach within early television. Jacobs' work uncovered the early canon of television drama and how it was constructed, indicating that early television drama was not, as previously theorized, static and theatrical but was rapidly moving towards an understanding of the potential of the new medium and how it could be used to create drama that was specifically televisual. The dramas which Jacobs identifies and

excavates recover the production processes and the pioneering spirit of the BBC, and the spaces in which the BBC was building its operations. This work informs the early part of this thesis as regards the BBC children's television drama in the 1950s and into the 1960s, in which I use BBC WAC records to reconstruct several early productions, such as *Puck of Pook's Hill* (BBC, 1951). Work on British television drama by John Caughie and George Brandt chooses to recapitulate this research focus on 'serious' drama; while their work is valuable and necessary, it works to marginalize television drama that is not part of the 'serious' canon.⁴⁰ In his survey of popular television series, Chapman suggests 'three broad reasons why popular television series (as opposed to serials or single plays) have been marginalized in the writing of television history': 'the privileging of most television critics and historians of the traditional concepts of "realism" and "quality" in assessing television drama'; the privileging of 'authored' drama in television; and 'the nature of the format', which as a series 'resists conventional methods of filmic or literary analysis'.⁴¹ While much of children's television fantasy drama was produced as serials, to facilitate narrative development, literacy and audience loyalty, Chapman's identification of the marginalization of popular forms and genres is applicable. Children's television fantasy has been marginalized in academic research for being fantastic, televisual and above all, 'for the children.'

However, several valuable works have been produced on children's television itself, albeit with a sociological accent: *Children's Television in Britain* by David Buckingham et al, *Children, Television and the Home* by David Oswell, and

⁴⁰ John Caughie *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism and British Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) and George Brandt *British Television Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) & *British Television Drama in the 1980s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

⁴¹ James Chapman *Saints and Avengers* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 3-4

several works by Maire Messenger Davies, *Television is Good for Your Kids*, *Dear BBC*, and *Fake, Fact and Fantasy*. Of these last, several were produced in collaboration with the BBC and are therefore considered carefully as academic works, in order to avoid over-privileging institutional constructions of the field. They are however works which use the much-neglected, and notoriously slippery, research methodology of qualitative research with children to examine the relationship children have with television drama. Other works by Buckingham also analyse children's interaction with television through observed research in classrooms and structured interaction: *Moving Images*, *Children Talking Television* and 'In the Worst Possible Taste'.⁴² Also deserving of mention is the brief but celebratory history of British children's television, *Into the Box of Delights*, by former Head of Children's BBC, Anna Home, and the industrial guide by Roger Singleton-Turner, *Television and Children*.

This is not to suggest that these accounts necessarily come to an agreement. Buckingham et al assess Oswell's work as a 'comprehensive, Foucauldian history of television and the child audience which considerably overestimates both the social capability of public service television and the cohesiveness of its project; in doing so, in our view he exaggerates television's effect on the subjectivities of its audience, and correspondingly overlooks what we judge to be compelling evidence about the uncertainties of broadcasters.'⁴³ These uncertainties about audience, form and the function of children's television, I argue, certainly contribute to the way in which fantasy is situated within children's broadcasting throughout the twentieth century. However, I also suggest that Buckingham's comprehensive

⁴² David Buckingham and Hannah Davies, 'In the Worst Possible Taste', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* January 1, 2000 vol. 3 no. 1: 5-25

⁴³ Buckingham et al, *Children's Television in Britain*, 16

dismissal of Oswell's stance also diminishes the entirely legitimate account of British children's television as a production culture that has always been built around, and even emblematic of, public service broadcasting values, and remains so to this day. Much of the debate around children's television in the early years of the medium was located around the idea of addiction and harm but, as Oswell also convincingly argues, institutionally it was also being positioned as a medium which would transmit post-war democracy, unity and modernity into the domestic space and re-constitute the child audience as citizens as much as listeners and viewers.⁴⁴ Necessarily, this discursive construction was heavily reliant upon public and institutional constructions of value and quality, concerns which Messenger Davies sustains due to her collaborative relationship with the BBC and the production of several of her works, most notably *Television is Good for Your Kids* (1989) and *Dear BBC* (2001), at a time when the provision of children's public service broadcasting was under threat from political and industrial change in the late 1980s and 1990s.

While children's television had been regarded throughout the twentieth century as emblematic of public service values, across broadcasting it had suffered from being a schedule which brought in less money than other programming; 'a charity adjunct' and a 'Cinderella service'. Consequently, departmental budgets and resources were lower than those allocated to other departments and services, and were routinely allocated less time in studio and production service departments such as costume. Institutional and industrial marginalization seems to have extended to academic consideration of children's drama as a form and genre which is deserving of further investigation.

⁴⁴ David Oswell *Television, Childhood and the Home* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002)

Realism/fantasy across media

This relegation has not been isolated to form and scheduling but also operates within mode and aesthetic, through the marginalization of the fantastic in a culture and aesthetic which has tended to valorize the realist. Fantasy, and other non-realist genres, in literature as well as television have been overlooked as sheer escapism, a perspective which was appropriated with fervour by Tolkien, stating, ‘Why should a man be scorned, if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he cannot do so, he thinks and talks about other topics than jailers and prison walls?’⁴⁵ ‘Fantasy’, he declares, ‘is a natural human activity.’⁴⁶ Other treatments of fantasy in literature have been more sombre. Tzvetan Todorov’s structural analysis subdivides the uncanny, the marvellous and the fantastic into poetics but argues for the fantastic as the most representative and potent of these theorized subcategories. However as both Maria Nikolajeva and Rosemary Jackson note, Todorov is working towards a very narrow definition of the fantastic, which pivots upon the idea that ‘the essence of fantasy for Todorov lies in the *hesitation of the protagonists (and the reader)* as confronted with the supernatural – which is anything that goes beyond the natural laws’ (emphasis mine).⁴⁷ This is a useful working definition for Todorov’s focus upon the literature of the 18th and 19th century but not as productive for fantasy upon television, which relies upon a more flexible and active operation of spectatorship, hesitation and affect in the relationship between viewer and text. In fact, both Nikolajeva and Jackson’s exploration of fantasy are of more use in discussing fantasy as a genre and in relation to children’s media. As Nikolajeva suggests, ‘Fantasy for children would probably

⁴⁵ Tolkien ‘On Fairy Stories’ in *Tree and Leaf*, 60

⁴⁶ Ibid, 55

⁴⁷ Maria Nikolajeva *The Magic Code* Unpublished doctoral thesis (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1988), 10

fall under the category of the marvellous in [Todorov's] theory, since the young reader is supposed to believe what he is told'.⁴⁸ While this is an oversimplification, particularly if we consider fantasy texts such as *The Owl Service* or *Archer's Goon* which offer fractured and often conflicting subjectivities, the orientation of children's fantasy towards the marvelous is significant for in Ann Swinfen's definition, [t]he essential ingredient of all fantasy is 'the marvellous', which will be regarded as anything outside the normal space-time continuum of the everyday world.'⁴⁹

However, television itself is outside the normal space-time continuum of the everyday world' by virtue of the separation of its production from its transmission and reception. Consequently, television itself may be seen, in itself as fantastic. 'Much of television is about illusion,' as Singleton-Turner points out. 'This is true even of magazine and documentary programmes. Their illusion is that they show the viewer reality, life as it really happened.'⁵⁰

The argument that the screen is inherently fantastic is a longstanding contention, particularly within film. Bazin stated that realism and fantasy within the cinema were inextricably linked due to the ontology of the medium:

The fantastic in the cinema is possible only because of the irresistible realism of the photographic image. It is the image that can bring us face to face with the unreal, that can introduce the unreal into the world of the visible. [...] What in fact appeals to the audience about the fantastic in the cinema is its realism – I mean, the

⁴⁸ Nikolajeva *The Magic Code*, 10

⁴⁹ Cit in Nikolajeva *The Magic Code*, 11

⁵⁰ Roger Singleton-Turner *Television and Children* (Borehamwood: BBC Television training, 1994), 110

contradiction between the irrefutable objectivity of the photographic image and the unbelievable nature of the events that it depicts.⁵¹

Christian Metz likewise suggests ontology is complicated by medium: ‘Fantastic art is fantastic only as it convinces (otherwise it is merely ridiculous), and the power of unreality in film derives from the fact that the unreal seems to have been realized, unfolding before our eyes as if it were the flow of common occurrence—not the plausible illustration of some extraordinary process only conceived in the mind.’ Re-production in visual media both realizes and un-realizes the subject. ‘On the screen,’ Metz summarises of both film and television, ‘it is unreal.’⁵²

In television, realism and fantasy have, since its earliest conception, sustained an uneasy relationship with the medium, and the construction of a canon of ‘fantasy’ drama therefore raises its own definitional and methodological issues. Early conceptualization of television emphasized its ability to relay the real and immediate. John Caughie cites a 1936 article by Gerald Cock, Director of Television, which stated

In my view, television is from its very nature, more suitable for the dissemination of all kinds of information than for entertainment as such, since it can hardly be expected to compete successfully with films in that respect.⁵³

Jason Jacobs also notes the emphasis put upon early television as a medium which generated a ‘first level of interest [...] in the

⁵¹ Andre Bazin, ‘The Life and Death of Superimposition’ in *Bazin at Work* (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), 73

⁵² Christian Metz *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 24

⁵³ Caughie *Television Drama*, 31

instant relay of public, national events and ceremonies (immediacy); then to contemporary celebrities (topicality); then to the detail afforded by vision ('expressions and gestures') that the optical and technical advantage of the television camera offers.'⁵⁴

However, television as a medium, regardless of whether it broadcasts documentary or drama, necessarily constructs its texts and may therefore reflect the real but not necessarily transmit it. Davies raises this issue with regard to children's understanding of reality and fantasy on television, locating all television, whether factual or fictional, mimetic or fantastic, as 'the product of a great deal of human artifice'.⁵⁵ Consequently, the ontological nature of television becomes complicated and divided between several different planes of experience and the relationships between them: the physical set, the institutions, the industry, the audience and the text. The production, broadcast and the reception of television drama often elides the practices, structures, and phenomenological disjunct between the textual and quotidian world. If television drama operates through fiction, how can we separate out fiction from more overt fantasy? Johnson's *Telefantasy* attempts a working topography of television fantasy but admits that any definition will be unstable.

Telefantasy developed as a term of generic identification in 1970s fan discourses such as the magazines *Starburst* and *TVZone*. It disseminated from there into the industry and academia, culminating in the 2006 monograph by Catherine Johnson, which argued for telefantasy as a reflexive genre which not only responds to cultural anxieties but 'suggests the possibility of adopting a dialectical position, in which texts can

⁵⁴ Jason Jacobs *The Intimate Screen* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 29

⁵⁵ Maire Messenger Davies *Fake, Fact and Fantasy* (Mahwah, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1997), 4

be experimental and formulaic, spectacular and intimate, economically successful and aesthetically valued.’⁵⁶ However, until the 1990s, telefantasy remained a marginal genre, often conflated with cult media due to its derivation from fan discourses. Johnson’s association of telefantasy with the textual and narrative structures Matt Hills calls perpetuated hermeneutics and hyperdiegesis⁵⁷ strengthened this association with cult media, but definitions of telefantasy are further complicated by the conflation within television studies of genres such as science fiction, fantasy and horror under the umbrella of telefantasy, in opposition to literary studies’ careful and lengthy parsing of these genres. The difficulty of arguing for genre within television at all was noted by Jason Jacobs, who described the ‘longstanding hybridity and promiscuity of television genres’.⁵⁸ Feuer and Mittel agree with Jacobs on the instability of genre as a structure in television. However, both differ in their theorization of ways in which to approach genre in television: Feuer suggesting genre as an abstraction⁵⁹ and Mittell as an interdependent relationship between text, producer and audience,⁶⁰ a theorization which is problematic for a child audience and which will be explored later in this literature review. Certainly, as constructions of childhood shifted with historical context between the 1950s and the 1990s, so too did the institutional construction of the child audience. Readings of fantasy and its generic construction responded as part of this matrix of social relationships, education, state concern, and spectatorship. While drama and narrative were consistently valorized as one of the forms which could engage the child

⁵⁶ Catherine Johnson *Telefantasy* (London: BFI, 2006), 149

⁵⁷ Matt Hills *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2002), 117-43

⁵⁸ Jason Jacobs, ‘Issues of Judgement and Taste in Television Studies’, *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 4.4 (2001), 427-447

⁵⁹ Jane Feuer ‘Genre Study and Television’ in *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled* ed. Robert C. Allen (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 138-160

⁶⁰ Jason Mittell, *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004)

audience cognitively and affectively, transmitting social, cultural and institutional values, genre was, by its very nature, not always as stable a discourse. Selected case studies will draw out some of these historical and generic specificities.

The uses of fantasy in children's television

Despite, or perhaps because of, its formal and generic mutability, the fantastic within children's *television* was an unbroken continuum, adopting different modes such as puppetry under Lingstrom, animation under everyone or promotion as with the early ITV rocketship presentation, in response to changing historical imperatives, but fantasy in children's *drama* was more uneven. This was due in large part to the demands of production but even more was it dependent upon the construction of the child audience and their developmental, moral and social needs. It is notable that when education and paternalism are explicitly invoked as guiding principles in the production and discourse of children's television, as under Freda Lingstrom and later Edward Barnes at the BBC, the production of fantasy drama declines in the weekday schedules and instead becomes part of a specialized discourse, such as puppetry under Lingstrom and Christmas programming under Barnes. However, it does not necessarily follow that fantasy drama was automatically categorized as pure entertainment under other Heads of Department. Rather, it becomes evident from analysis of productions during these periods that fantasy was rather seen as an essential and integral part of children's cognitive and social development rather than adjacent to it, during these periods. *The Changes*, for example, is identified by Peter Wright as a text that uses fantasy to

reconcile the racial tensions within 1970s Britain.⁶¹ Similarly, HTV West's *The Georgian House* opened up the hidden history of the slave trade in Bristol through a fantastic timeslip narrative. Consequently, fantasy drama became part of the construction of the child audience's presumed identity and interaction with the wider world. 'By both evoking and disturbing socio-cultural verisimilitude'⁶², fantasy drama could draw the attention of the child viewer to dissonance within the text and thus to its narrative resolution, most often situated as part of a model of community, democracy and liberal public values, albeit often inflected historically.

However, fantasy drama could also be used as an analogue for the experience of television viewing itself. Several of the children's fantasy dramas under investigation in this thesis foreground television as a fantastic medium, suggesting what Wheatley has described as 'anxieties around television's status as a potentially invasive medium'⁶³ and the connotations of the uncanny implicit in that relationship between the medium and the domestic space. As a result, a television interview with the Clare children about their haunted house in *The Clifton House Mystery* (HTV West, 1978) reactivates the ghosts, much to the boys' delight. In *Middle English's* 'Interference' (Thames/ITV, 1985), the face of a sobbing woman appears in the static of a television set, and in *Ernie's Incredible Illucinations* (BBC, 1987), Ernie conjures up a squad of Nazi soldiers from an afternoon film on television. Perhaps, more scarifyingly, both *Knightmare* and *Dramarama's* 'Mr Stabs' both broke the bounds of a fantastic world to look out of the television screen at their viewers, confirming Jowett and Abbott's suggestion that 'telefantasy and TV horror continues to represent the television

⁶¹ Wright 'A Condition of England' in *Science Fiction Film and Television*

⁶² Johnson *Telefantasy*, 8

⁶³ Helen Wheatley *Gothic Television* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 200

as a potentially malevolent portal'.⁶⁴

The emphasis upon television as a technology of unreality also highlights the generic blurring which this thesis will also address. Whereas in literary studies, there has been a sustained focus upon separating out horror, science fiction and fantasy as genres, television genre has been noted as 'notoriously hybridised'⁶⁵ and generically 'promiscuous'. Johnson's theorization of telefantasy to date has identified the slippery nature of the genre. Consequently, fantasy upon television, telefantasy, has come to stand for a number of wildly differing productions, which might otherwise be categorized more narrowly as science fiction, horror and fantasy. However, this loose categorization also allows for generic slippage, and the incorporation of genres not quite as easily assimilated to the literary field. Non-naturalistic drama, for example, whilst not qualifying as pure fantasy is still fantastic in nature. Channel 4's *SWALK* (1983), for example, was ostensibly a realist coming of age story in which protagonist Amanda struggles with sibling rivalry, her burgeoning sexuality and peer pressure. However, the diegesis was punctured by the non-naturalistic inlay of Prunella Scales as Aunt Patty, the agony aunt from the girls' magazine Amanda consults. As the narrative develops, it becomes rapidly apparent that the mediatized advice Aunt Patty is churning out to a generation of girls is destructive mentally, physically and socially, and in fact has left Amanda open to sexual assault. Similarly, HTV West's *Jangles* (1982) used non-naturalisms to comment upon its own realist diegesis. Both texts are firmly rooted in the day to day of British cultural life at the time of their production, yet offer a metatextual commentary on the narratives through almost carnivalesque production

⁶⁴ Jowett and Abbott *TV Horror*, 180

⁶⁵ Graeme Turner 'Genre, Hybridity and Mutations' in *The Television Genre Book* ed. Toby Miller, John Tulloch & Glen Creeber (London: BFI, 2001), 6

methods, such as video effects, extradiegetic narrative, and a postmodern distance from the diegesis; in short, production and textual strategies which Johnson identifies as offering ‘new (and potentially subversive) perspectives on society’.⁶⁶ Thus, this thesis concerns itself with matters of definition and form but rather than choosing to outline a teleological understanding of what might be described as the genre of children’s telefantasy, it attempts to establish the place of fantasy within the institutional provision of children’s television, its departmental organizations and how it was articulated within the productions for children’s television across and beyond the regulated duopoly. But this thesis suggests that the key criteria for deploying the fantastic in children’s television remained ethical, in line with the unstable but persistent idea that children’s television should maintain public service values.

Fantasy for children was during this period categorized as a genre necessary to children’s development, both psychologically and socially, therefore lending itself neatly to its deployment within public service broadcasting. Bruno Bettelheim’s seminal work was not the first to suggest that the fantastic space of the fairy tale could be integral to child development. Benjamin Walter’s earlier work in ‘The Storyteller’ suggested that

Whenever good counsel was at a premium, the fairy tale had it, and where the need was greatest, its aid was nearest. This need was the need created by the myth. The fairy tale tells us of the earliest arrangements that mankind made to shake off the nightmare which the myth had placed upon its chest.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Johnson *Telefantasy*, 8

⁶⁷ Walter Benjamin ‘The Storyteller’ in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 102

Benjamin continued, ‘The wisest thing – so the fairy tale taught making in the olden times, and teaches children to this day – is to meet the forces of the mythical world with cunning and high spirits.’⁶⁸ Thus, the nexus between childhood development and fantastic spaces that had been implicit in the association of children with fairy tales became elaborated upon, and reified, in first Benjamin’s and then Bettelheim’s work.

Bettelheim’s *The Uses of Enchantment* flowered from Benjamin’s idea of the therapeutic power of storytelling and the social cohesion and models which Propp identified in folk tales, as well as the rise of psychoanalysis. Applying psychoanalytical theory to fairy tales, Bettelheim convincingly argued that the fantastic space of the fairy tale could be used by children to work through psychological conflict and social tensions. Bettelheim goes so far as to suggest that the working of the fairy tale mirrors the psychological operation of the human mind and encourages a healthy negotiation of reality: ‘The “truth” of fairy stories is the truth of our imagination, not that of normal causality.’⁶⁹ For Bettelheim, the child’s ability to identify and use both the real and the fantastic through fairy tales develops the ability to recognise truth, asserting that

The child intuitively comprehends that although these stories are unreal, they are not *untrue*; that while what these stories tell about does not happen in fact, it must happen as inner experience and personal development; that fantasy tales depict in imaginary and symbolic form the essential steps in growing up and achieving an independent existence.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Walter Benjamin ‘The Storyteller’ in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 102

⁶⁹ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 117

⁷⁰ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 73

While his analysis has subsequently come under fire from other theorists such as Jack Zipes and Marina Warner for what they see as a dangerous approach to ‘othering,’ Bettelheim’s work remains influential, and significant to a field such as children’s television drama within public service broadcasting.

Following Bettelheim’s work, Maire Messenger Davies develops the argument that fantasy media is likewise therapeutic and can, like the fairy tale, ‘suggest images to the child by which he can structure his daydreams and with them give better direction to his life.’⁷¹ Davies extrapolates this relationship between the fantastic and childhood in regard to television, articulating children’s drama as ‘crazyspace’, a space in which the orthodoxies and dichotomies of the everyday, adult world could be turned upside down.⁷² Children’s drama is, in short, a space of carnival where children knew more than adults and where subject formation through ‘cunning and high spirits’ and community could be prompted. In this way, I suggest that children’s television fantasy resonates with Johnson’s conception of telefantasy as offering ‘new (and potentially subversive) perspectives on society.’ Children’s television fantasy can offer an escape from children’s reality, oriented around the repressive structures of education, social marginalization, and adult authority. Johnson suggests that this subversive fantastic is created through ‘both evoking and disturbing socio-cultural verisimilitude.’⁷³ This is arguably all the more important for a child audience since children’s grasp of genre, medium, and most importantly reality is less developed than adults’. Certainly, it was a generic mechanism that was noted and reiterated by industry professionals. Both

⁷¹ Bettelheim *The Uses of Enchantment*, 7

⁷² Maire Messenger Davies ‘“Crazyspace”: The Politics Of Children’s Screen Drama’ in *Screen* 46 (3): 389-399. doi:10.1093/screen/46.3.389.

⁷³ Johnson, *Telefantasy*, 8

Anna Home and Lewis Rudd stated in interview that establishing reality within a fantasy drama was crucial, not only textually but through the spaces and sites of the drama as a way into the text itself for child viewers, reinforcing Johnson's conception of telefantasy as reliant upon a double mechanism of socio-cultural verisimilitude to create affect.

Fantasy in children's television is therefore not necessarily about the tropes of the fantastic, or what Nikolajeva calls fantasemes, the 'recurrent narrative element inherent in fantasy as a genre'⁷⁴; in other words, haunted houses; ghosts; other worlds; monsters; ink thieves; a demon headmaster; a boy who turns into a dog; talking lions and walking trees; a race of tiny people who live behind the skirting boards; a box of delights; etc. Rather it is as much about the relationship between spaces and styles on the screen as it is about visual and narrative elements. If we consider texts such as 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' or *Tom's Midnight Garden*, the key moment of transition between the mimetic and the fantastic is created through simple cuts: both Lucy and Tom open doors and between one shot and the next are struck by the knowledge that they are in an other world. The fantastic is embedded at the formal level in the transitive space of editing. By contrast, *A Traveller in Time* and *The Moon Stallion*, both produced by Dorothea Brooking, use editing to reveal that the fantastic was already in the background of shots. It is not the cuts themselves which create the fantastic but the newly-revealed perspective allowed by the shots. This also destabilizes the levels of reality, reflecting the creation of fantasy through transitive states in the original literary texts. The spaces created by the introduction of Colour Separation Overlay also create implicit relationships between the spaces and times of production and culture, which

⁷⁴ Nikolajeva, *The Magic Code*, 10

recapitulate those moments of aperçu and learning. Through colour switching and matteing, multiple spaces and times can co-exist within the same production space, making it useful for timeslip dramas such as *The Georgian House* and non-naturalistic bricolage in programmes like *Jangles*. Thus, fantasy is created as much by spatial and syntactical arrangements as by the visual, textual and narrative elements, and the recognition by child viewers of the differences and continuities between these real and diegetic spaces; what Bettelheim identifies as the truth of the unreal.

Fantasy drama as production culture

Not only did fantasy function as an analogue for the extra-rational understanding of children, the importance of play, and the use of fantasy in cognitive development, it is also arguably emblematic of the children's schedule on British television. Davies suggests that fantasy is not only suited to children's television but that children's television is one of the few places where fantasy can be produced. In *Dear BBC*, she quoted 'Alan Horrox (interviewed for the BBC study in spring, 1996), working in the commercial system, [who] valued the creative freedom permitted by children's drama, which specifically meant not 'being done good to': You can work in genres that perhaps don't exist in adult television. You can mix fantasy and comedy in ways that are generally seen as iconoclastic in adult television. These are totally normal in children's programmes . . . I'm not a great devotee of social realism for kids . . . I link it in my mind with this adult feeling that kids have to be done good to . . . I'm much more the Roald Dahl school, which is a mixture of delight and savagery.'⁷⁵ (In the wake of recent Saturday night

⁷⁵ Davies *Dear BBC*, 69

productions such as *Merlin*, *Atlantis* and *Doctor Who*, this does not seem as convincing as it did in the 1990s.) In this, the regulated duopoly partly prefigured the kids-only approach and schedules formalized by later commercial broadcasters for children, such as Nickelodeon, by deploying the fantastic as one of the genres particular to the children's service.⁷⁶ However, despite persistent fears of Americanisation, the children's programming provided by both the BBC and ITV was a distinctly British service, not simply in terms of its taproot public service values but in its representation, even or perhaps especially within fantasy drama. Home's assertion that children deserved a schedule and service of their own was linked to her conviction that children should 'hear, see and express themselves, their culture, their languages and their life experiences, through television programmes which affirm their sense of community and place.'⁷⁷

Clearly, then, the uses and pleasures of fantasy drama were not merely articulated as useful to the child audience but also pertinent to the producers of children's television, as confirmed by Alan Horrox, executive producer for fantasy dramas *The Gemini Factor* (Thames, 1987), *Time Riders* (Thames, 1991), *My Friend Walter* (Thames, 1992) and the 1992 remake of *The Tomorrow People*. The literature that discusses children's television fantasy drama tends to frame it as an essential part of child development but what may be overlooked is how the genre may also be therapeutic for public service broadcasting. This feeling that fantasy was a genre that was pleasurable and productive for producers was reiterated by Anna Home, former Head of Children's Programmes, at the BBC, who stated in interview that much of the fantasy output she developed was

⁷⁶ See Karen Lury, 'A Time and a Place for Everything: Children's Channels' in *Small Screens: Television for Children* ed. David Buckingham (London: Leicester University Press, 2002), 15-38

⁷⁷ *The Children's Television Charter*, developed by Home, at <http://www.wsmcf.com/charters/charter.htm> (accessed January 4th, 2016)

due to her own personal fondness for the genre and its literary counterpart, which may in turn have led to the strong tradition of adaptation and literary collaboration under Home. ITV companies also developed their own more flexible and contingent tradition of adaptation for children's drama. According to Lewis Rudd, who worked in children's television at Associated Rediffusion, Thames, Southern and Central,

the BBC always did these semi-classics: *Five Children and It*, *The Secret Garden* and things, and not only did they always do those but they seemed to re-do them every few years. They seemed to do a fresh production every few years so there was no point in trying to get into that area, so I decided that I'd do an adaptation of a modern children's book although the first one I chose was one by Leon Garfield.⁷⁸

This use of 'alternative' adaptations by ITV can be seen at work in Granada's *The Owl Service*, just two years after its publication, *Escape into Night* (ATV, 1972), *Worzel Gummidge* (Southern, 1979-81), *The Snow Spider* (HTV, 1988) and many others.

Children reading fantasy

This thesis argues for the prevalence and popularity of the fantasy drama within children's television despite its marginalisation, but problems still remain with both its reception and theorisation. These two are generically interlinked. In identifying the potential subversion of the fantasy form, Johnson's *Telefantasy* draws upon the producer-text-audience relationship and theorisation to explore resistance and

⁷⁸ Lewis Rudd, phone Interview with author, July 10th 2013

reading of the text. ‘In relation to telefantasy,’ states Johnson, ‘most of this work has focused on the study of fans, whose engagement with and re-articulation of television texts have been understood as a form of “active” spectatorship through which they resist dominant ideology and find spaces for social transformation (see Jenkins, 1992).’⁷⁹ The term telefantasy thus developed from fan discourses and, it appears, so did the “active” viewing practices and decoding associated with the genre.

However, children’s viewing, while it shares some of the features of fan viewing practices, cannot be so easily mapped onto the same discursive models of spectatorship, genre, and media consumption. Children’s understanding of media and genre has been exhaustively explored by media historians like Maire Messenger Davies, David Buckingham, and Muriel Robinson, who have all indicated that while children have become regarded as savvy, media-literate consumers, their interpretation of media texts remains developmental and contingent.⁸⁰ In fact, as all three indicate, where children do not understand the genre, ontology or meaning of productions, they attempt to derive their own readings, drawing upon their own knowledge of genre and narrative and the plausibility of the text, and coping strategies.⁸¹ One of the main strategies all identify as crucial to children’s readings of genre and reality is the ‘modality – or the “perceived reality” of the text.’ Drawing from Hodge and Tripp’s research on children and semiotics,⁸² Davies and Buckingham use their term ‘modality judgements’ to indicate how children use literacy across media, as well as evaluation of formal, stylistic and narrative properties, to evaluate the generic and ontological plausibility of each text.

⁷⁹ Johnson *Telefantasy*, 12

⁸⁰ David Buckingham *Moving Images* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 130

⁸¹ Ibid 307 and 213

⁸² Bob Hodge and David Tripp *Children and Television* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986)

Buckingham however notes such critical activity, whether correct or contingent, does not preclude an adverse emotional response, and might even increase its likelihood.⁸³ While this thesis does not employ an ethnographic methodology, it is important to recognize that the child viewer's differentiation of genre, television modality and phenomenological reality may not be that of an older television viewer, let alone an academic. The existing research (Davies; Buckingham; Oswell; Steemers; etc) that this literature review examines focuses most frequently upon both the psychological and pedagogical negotiations which children make with television, rather than looking at the programmes themselves. Of those few theorists that do examine the texts and contexts of children's fantasy drama, Helen Wheatley and Alison Peirse have made compelling, if brief, forays into textual analysis of fantasy dramas such as *The Children of Green Knowe* (BBC, 1986), *Moondial* (BBC, 1989) and *Dark Season* (BBC, 1991), and their approach has been influential upon this thesis. However, care has also been taken to recognize the epistemological differences between academic analysis and the understanding of the intended audience, and contextualize accordingly.

The differential between adults' reception and interpretation of television and children's understanding of it has, in fact, been one of the driving forces behind the campaign for children's television as an entirely separate production culture and discourse. Whether the child audience was identified and theorised in terms of paternalism or child-centredness, as citizens or as consumers,⁸⁴ the production ecology of children's television in the latter half of the twentieth century was always conscious of British children as a specialized and arguably a vulnerable audience. Davies cites Aimee Dorr as having

⁸³ Buckingham *Moving Images*, 133 and 305

⁸⁴ Buckingham *Children's Television in Britain*, 149

‘characterised three important aspects of the child TV audience which make it ‘special’. The first is that ‘children are lacking in knowledge of their physical and social world’. The second is that children are ‘eager to learn about it’; the third is that children are ‘only partially equipped with the needed learning tools’.⁸⁵

Inevitably, this construction of children as developing has two important effects, in both production and reception. The first is that the child audience, regardless of its historical construction as passive and gullible consumer, media literate and resistant viewer, consumer or citizen, has always been regarded institutionally as requiring a different television schedule and mode of production than adult television. It may be axiomatic but it is important to state that within British broadcasting the child audience may have been incorporated into the domestic audience but it has never been regarded as identical. On more than one occasion, Anna Home has stated that children need their own television as a part of their own cognitive, emotional and social development.⁸⁶ However, the second implication is that the developmental trajectory of the child audience, which Dorr states means they are only ‘partially equipped with the tools’ means that their understanding of television is incomplete and therefore any understanding of genre, mode and meaning is necessarily also in flux at any given time.

Davies explores children’s grasp of reality as it pertains to television more thoroughly in *Dear BBC*. She notes of children’s interaction with modality in particular that

studies tend to find evidence of a Piagetian process of stage development. A particularly strong finding in

⁸⁵ Davies *Dear BBC*, 91

⁸⁶ Anna Home, interview with author, London, June 21st, 2013, and Davies *Children and Television Drama*

cognitive developmental studies, which also occurred in my own research with 6-11 year olds in Philadelphia (Davies, 1997), is that children under the age of 7 or 8 seem to find it difficult to make 'meta-judgements'. Meta-judgements require us to be reflexive, to think about thinking, or to talk about talking; metalinguistic ability enables children to understand puns, double entendres, metaphors, paradox and irony, the ways in which language can create layers of meaning, some apparently contradictory, many funny to adults, but often baffling to young children. Psycholinguistic research on children's 'theories of mind' – their ability to understand the thought processes of themselves and others, as in being able to recognize when someone is lying – or, indeed, acting – indicates that some of the techniques of both verbal language and television/film language, can be difficult to appreciate for under-sevens (see, for example, Harris et al., 1991; Moore and Frye, 1991).⁸⁷

This was explored further in Davies' *Fake, Fact and Fantasy*. Her research looked at children's understanding of modality as a series of formal and visual cues in television and discovered that while children often had a sophisticated understanding of how television worked, there were gaps in their understanding. One child interviewed identified that *Sesame Street*'s Big Bird was not real but their modality judgment was based on the fact that Big Bird was too fat for a piano bench he was sitting on.⁸⁸ Davies identified types of modality which children recognized and negotiated as ways of differentiating the real from the fantastic or fictional, but some of these negotiations were works in progress, and gaps in their understanding would be bridged

⁸⁷ Davies *Dear BBC*, 92-93

⁸⁸ Davies *Fake, Fact and Fantasy*, 88-90

with speculative or even fantastic thinking: when reviewing a fantasy drama, more than one child suggests that special effects were effected with magic.⁸⁹ However, Davies and Buckingham both note that media literacy develops with age, as do Gunter and McAleer whose research suggests children below the age of seven were most at risk of confusing reality and fantasy, ‘up to the age of 7 or 8, the distinction between fantasy and reality is often cloudy’⁹⁰, but that by the age of twelve children could use formal and stylistic cues to distinguish between the two on television. More specifically, Gunter and McAleer’s research suggested that ‘the age of 8 has been found to be a crucial time when understanding suddenly improves. Children older than eight seldom thought of television as offering a “magic window” on the world.’⁹¹

Consequently, the ability to distinguish between reality and fantasy, reality and television – to make, in short, meta-judgements – emerges around the age of seven. Audience designations by the BBC and ITV of ranges 7-14 years old for drama unsurprisingly mesh with this model of child development. While older children and adults would undoubtedly also be unable to explain how certain televisual effects were achieved, it seems likely that they would not conflate television effects with real magic taking place on screen; in other words, the use of enchantment by industry. This also contributes to the remit of this thesis that focuses upon fantasy drama produced for, and more comprehensively understood by, child viewers of school age.

However, even without a full understanding of television as a medium and mode, existing research suggests that child viewers

⁸⁹ Davies *Fake, Fact and Fantasy*, 115-116

⁹⁰ Barrie Gunter and Jill McAleer, *Children and Television* (London & New York: Routledge, 1990), 45

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 46

may still attempt to 'read' television texts and genres. In her investigation of how children read narrative across media, Muriel Robinson showed children an episode of *Theatre Box* (and later *Dramarama*) by Thames Television, 'Mr Magus is Waiting for You'. While the child viewers were unfamiliar with television fantasy, they recognized narrative elements as being similar to fairy stories and folk tales and drew upon this knowledge of form and genre to speculate about the television text. Children's understanding of genre is therefore not only affected by their understanding of what is happening on-screen, but by their pre-existing knowledge of genre, a phenomenon which Buckingham investigates more closely in *Children Talking Television*. Although productions may be medium-specific and therefore hard to read in their totality for child viewers, literacy, it can be argued, is reflexive and offers a way through unfamiliar texts towards development. Through television fantasy drama, children learn to make sense of stories and of their own world.

Thesis structure

This thesis is split into five chapters, tracing the history of production and aesthetics of children's television fantasy by the BBC from 1950 to 1996, and ITVs' output of the same from 1955 also to 1996. Case studies examining a variety of children's fantasy drama over several decades, some of which have never been released commercially, will establish both the persistence of fantasy as a constituent part of children's television drama and the ways in which these productions were also useful within the historical media landscape.

Starting in 1950 with the establishment of the BBC Children's Programmes department, Chapter Two (Chapter One addresses the introduction and literature review) addresses the uses of fantasy within early children's television drama. Fantasy was used to facilitate what Madden thought of as style and showmanship, a distinctive voice and aesthetic and a deliberate strategy of drama production. However, the hybridity and showbiz associations which these early fantasies connoted were regarded with suspicion by the BBC and consequently I argue instrumental in the appointment of Lingstrom who, coming from Schools, had a more educationalist slant to television. Under Lingstrom, drama became a more worthy, though no less expansive, affair and, as a consequence, fantasy drama became less present in the schedules. Case studies of *Puck of Pook's Hill* and *Five Children and It* uncover the early history of children's fantasy drama by the BBC.

Chapter Three indexes the loss of drama production capabilities in BBC Children's before its temporary obsolescence when Family Programmes was established. Despite the loss of drama as part of the much more abbreviated children's schedules, I suggest that its absence was marked both culturally and

institutionally. Doreen Stephens, Head of Family Programmes, made concerted but unsuccessful efforts to bring back narrative drama to children's television. By contrast and in opposition to popular opinion, I argue, ITV companies were from the outset establishing a significant home-originated drama production culture. Often overshadowed by ITV's imported programmes for children, this thesis proposes that there was a consistent drama output from the ITV companies from 1955, which was later strengthened and brought further into line with public service broadcasting from 1964 when the ITA was awarded stronger regulatory powers. Consequently, fantasy drama production increased, and the case studies will illustrate the divergent avenues for children's drama production at the end of the 1960s with BBC Schools' *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1968) and Granada's *The Owl Service* (1969).

Chapter Four charts the return of BBC Children's in 1968 and the consequent resurgence of children's television drama in the 1970s, and the parallel rise of ITV Children's following the ITA's push for improved children's output from the late 1960s. I argue that this period provided a valuable space for the development of children's television as a schedule and fantasy as a mode and aesthetic. The increasing professionalisation of the BBC department, the developing use of children's drama as a competitive genre with which to access the ITV national network and the increasing perception of the child audience as active viewers, citizens and individuals meant that children's drama assumed both a cultural and institutional power it had previously been denied. As Janet Thumim said of primetime drama, it both reflected and promoted change, a dynamic which can be seen at work in the two case study productions, *The Georgian House* (HTV West, 1976) and *A Traveller in Time* (BBC, 1978).

In Chapter Five, I examine what Buckingham notes as the discursive re-situation of the child viewer as both consumer and citizen in the 1980s, perhaps a natural consequence of its conceptualization in the 1970s. This dichotomy was driven by the two major models of broadcasting operating throughout the decade: the besieged concept of public service broadcasting and the emergent model of subscription television through cable, satellite and commercial terrestrial. This dichotomy underpins chapter 5 which examines children's television both before and after the contentious Peacock Report of 1986. Although the Report failed to advocate for the rationale under which it had been established, that the BBC should be funded by advertising rather than the licence fee, Tracey described its outcome as 'a temporary stay of execution',⁹² rather than a victory for the BBC. Post-Peacock, both the BBC and ITV were increasingly under threat from the government to move towards 'a sophisticated market system based on consumer sovereignty'⁹³. Inevitably, this had an effect on children's drama. Chapter 5 will therefore contrast *Dramarama* episode 'The Young Person's Guide to Getting Their Ball Back', made by TVS in 1983, and *The Chronicles of Narnia* made by the BBC and broadcast between 1988 and 1990; the former a studio-bound fantastic drama satirizing the contemporary House of Commons, and the Narnia adaptations as fusions of public service values with commercial impulse to create dramas of 'retro-fit Britishness'⁹⁴, facilitated by international co-production.

Chapter Six addresses the further destabilization of the foundations of children's public service broadcasting in the

⁹² Michael Tracey, *The Decline and Fall of Public Service Broadcasting*, 114

⁹³ Home Office 'Report of the Committee on Financing the BBC, cit in Bob Franklin 'Television Policy Post-Peacock' in *British Television Policy: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2001), 6

⁹⁴ Alison Peirse 'A Broken Tradition: British Telefantasy And Children's Television In The 1980s And 1990s' in *Visual Culture In Britain* 11 (1): 109-124. doi:10.1080/14714780903509888, 112

wake of the 1990 Broadcasting Act. The most immediate blow resulting from this was the notorious ‘franchise auction’ of the ITV franchise areas and the downgrading of the IBA into the lighter touch ITC. This body also lost control of the ITV transmitters, therefore in terms of both broadcasting access and regulation returning to the largely impotent condition of before 1964. The BBC fared slightly better but the internal restructuring which John Birt argued was necessary before it was imposed externally also changed the production culture and aesthetics of children’s drama. It therefore, I argue, re-modulated itself to be a more discursive form, formalizing the commercial imperatives through new initiatives like BBC Children’s International. Even those dramas still being produced within the traditional BBC Children’s model were increasingly produced and promoted in ways which pushed the boundaries of children’s television. Thus, this chapter will conclude with case studies of *Wail of the Banshee*, produced in the last days of Central as a regional company and through its particularized children’s television production culture, using the Central Junior Television Workshop as its casting pool for local child actors, and BBC’s *Century Falls*. While both were produced in 1992-3, the two productions reflect the differing institutional fortunes of the regulated duopoly at this time. Central would a year later be absorbed into the increasingly monolithic ITV1 as a result of relaxation of ownership rules, and its long history as a producer-broadcaster of children’s television would be lost. BBC Children’s persists to this day, albeit as part of an embattled Corporation which has recently proposed the dispersal of BBC in-house production to more independent productions.

The concluding chapter draws together the threads of the previous chapters to address what has happened in British children’s television since 1994, and how this has impacted

upon fantasy drama. It suggests that British children's television fantasy drama still textually encodes public service values in productions such as *The Sarah Jane Adventures* and *Wolfblood* but that its production and longevity are driven by commercial applications, such as branding, merchandise and transmedia options. Chapter Seven also addresses those areas upon which this thesis has not touched, and suggests potential avenues for future research within the field of children's television.

Methodology

As a result of the breadth of the research remit and the previous lack of historical research in children's television drama, this thesis employs a range of research methods to address the questions of production and text. As previously noted, however, the question of reception falls outside the remit of this thesis. While the reception of fantasy drama by children might suggest some interesting conclusions in terms of the child audience's understanding of television as a whole and the pedagogical and recuperative values of the fantastic to children, as in part elucidated by Maire Messenger Davies in *Fake Fact and Fantasy* and David Buckingham's *Children Talking Television* and *Moving Images*, both the timeframe for research design and the author's own research history did not lend themselves to field research with child viewers or ethnography.

This study therefore focuses upon the history of children's television drama production in Britain, the institutional use of the fantastic within children's programming, and the cultural and educative uses of fantasy within British childhood. Given the historical and interpretive intent of the research, the research methods that seem most likely to develop a useful perspective on industry, culture and meaning are qualitative. Quantitative research may be useful in developing comparative studies or generalizable models from sampling but this study is specific to a mode of discourse, particular to the production of children's television in British broadcasting. More exactly, this thesis attempts to map the histories, production cultures and approaches to fantastic drama specific to institutions within British broadcasting and across British broadcasting more broadly; however, it also attempts to situate these histories within a legislative, industrial and cultural framework. Therefore it was judged that a qualitative methodology might be

the most productive approach.

The most notable research gap that this thesis attempts to address is the lack of textual analysis of children's fantasy dramas from the twentieth century. However, textual analysis frequently runs the risk of subjective interpretation and lack of historical situation, therefore further qualitative methods were used to contextualize all analysis. The research methods judged best to produce useful data and address further research lacunae were archival research and a production studies approach through elite interviews with industry professionals who had worked or were still working in children's television, so that a holistic picture of British children's television programming, services and cultures could be built up.

Because this thesis attempts not just a textual and historical analysis of children's drama programming, but an examination of the production cultures which created a strong and innovative tradition of British fantasy drama for children, qualitative research extends the possibility of building thin description of the production cultures into 'thick description'. Clifford Geertz used the concept of 'thick description' 'to describe the work of ethnography', a method which this thesis employs to build up an understanding of production cultures and how they contribute to an understanding of childhood and child development in 20th century Britain.⁹⁵ Geertz states that 'doing ethnography is establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary, and so on. But,' he continues, 'it is not these things, techniques and received procedures that define the enterprise.' Rather, he suggests, ethnography may be used to build up a deeper contextual and intellectual understanding of the cultures

⁹⁵ Clifford Geertz *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 6

under examination, or a ‘thick description’.⁹⁶

This is supported by Denzin’s subsequent elaboration of the term ‘thick description’ as doing ‘more than record[ing] what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. [...] It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question.’⁹⁷ Consequently, the use of ethnography to develop a complex and detailed understanding of several connected but disparate cultures seemed appropriate. This ethnography was built up by interviewing several industry professionals who had worked, and were working, within the field of children’s media in Britain and who had contributed significantly to the production and ethos of children’s television in the regulated duopoly. These included Anna Home, previously Head of Children’s BBC and Children’s & Young People’s Programmes at TVS; Lewis Rudd, previously Head of Children’s Programmes at Thames and Central; Alex Kirby, producer and director for HTV West, later freelance; Sue Nott, previously producer at Central and Commissioning Editor at Children’s BBC; Catherine Czerskawa, writer of *Shadow of the Stone* (STV, 1989); Bob Hescott, writer of *Wail of the Banshee* (Central, 1993), *Your Mother Wouldn’t Like It* (Central 1985-88), and *Palace Hill* (Central, 1988); Bob Baker, writer for *Doctor Who* and co-writer of several well-known 1970s children’s dramas for HTV West; Ray Ogden, Art Designer for *Captain Zep – Space Detective* (BBC, 1982-3), and John Dale, previously head of Children’s and Young People’s Television at TVS

⁹⁶ Clifford Geertz *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 6

⁹⁷ Norman K. Denzin *Interpretive Interactionism* (London: Sage, 1989), 100

Contact was initially made with several professionals such as Bob Baker and Ray Ogden through their personal websites, and networking with those interviewees led to further contact with potential research sources. These interviews were semi-structured, initially focusing upon interviewees' start in British television, working through their filmographies and then attempting to develop some understanding of the disparate production cultures within which they all worked. Obvious risks of the qualitative interview were that some of the interviewees might still be involved with institutions and therefore more limited in the information they could give, or had given these interviews so frequently that the interview was re-circulated information. Another danger was that many of the interviewees were working from memories of several decades ago. As a result, the interviews could return data that was subjective, biased, contradictory, and which could be skewed by leading questions, as Kvale suggests.⁹⁸

Textual analysis can be used to link these cultures to the artefacts they produce, as well as the wider social and historical contexts. Alan McKee defines textual analysis as making 'an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text.'⁹⁹ However, textual analysis can also be inherently problematic, as we can see even from McKee's relatively simple explanation. For instance, how do we define the education that allows the guess? What kind of epistemology does textual analysis work from? Are readings validated by particular educational structures? What *kinds* of knowledge do we need to read the text? How do we evaluate the *most* likely interpretations? Does this invalidate the less likely

⁹⁸ Steinar Kvale 'Ten standard objections to Qualitative Research Interviews' *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 25(2) 1994: 147-173, 148

⁹⁹ Alan McKee *Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide* (London, Thousand Oaks & New Delhi: Sage Publications Ltd.), 1

readings? What kinds of research produce certain kinds of data? As McKee points out, ‘no approach tells us the ‘truth’ about a culture.’¹⁰⁰ Textual analysis therefore works within a post-positivist discourse which does not produce absolutes but possible readings; this thesis works similarly, producing a range of possible readings using a range of methods and knowledges. Textual analysis, however, regardless of its author’s span of knowledge must necessarily run the risk of univocality and a lack of historical or industrial context, originating as it does from a particular academic perspective. In addition, textual analysis had for some years been out of favour within the academy but over the last decade, spirited arguments for its reinstatement as part of a television aesthetics have been advanced by Karen Lury,¹⁰¹ Glen Creeber,¹⁰² and Sarah Cardwell¹⁰³. Given children’s television’s concern with narrative, authorship and quality, and this thesis’ more particular focus upon visual style, form and ideology as constituents of fantasy drama, textual analysis is, I suggest, a productive starting point for production case studies.

This textual analysis will be further anchored by extensive archival research. Because of the aforementioned research lacunae, secondary research remains relatively scarce so primary research in television archives promised to be productive. Visits were made over several years to the BBC Written Archives Centre at Caversham to access policy files and individual production files for selected case study programmes. During that time, it also emerged that the ITA/IBA/Cable Authority Archive were held at the University of Bournemouth

¹⁰⁰ McKee *Textual Analysis*, 2

¹⁰¹ Karen Lury ‘Reports and Debates: “A Response to John Corner”’ in *Screen* (2007) 48 (3): 371-376
doi:10.1093/screen/hjm036

¹⁰² Glen Creeber ‘The Joy of Text? Television and Textual Analysis’, *Critical Studies in Television*; 2006, Vol. 1 Issue 1, p81

¹⁰³ Sarah Cardwell ‘Television aesthetics’ in *Critical Studies in Television: An International Journal of Television Studies* 1, no. 1 (2006): 72-80.

and that collection included the minutes from various ITA subcommittees, including that of the Children's Sub-Committee. The collection at Bournemouth has not been catalogued as the BBC WAC has and therefore the visits were slightly less productive but potentially less likely to be edited. This archival research also had the advantage of being relatively under-accessed, particularly with the ITA Archive, and the thesis could therefore potentially break new ground.

Existing research as previously stated has tended towards the sociological by looking at the effects of television upon the child viewer or histories of the development of the field, such as Buckingham's *Children's Television in Britain*. The research questions inherent in the thesis focus were therefore historical and interpretive: how did fantasy drama develop within British broadcasting children for children? Why? And what did it do? Research to answer these questions was gathered through the above methods and focused through selected case studies, which were chosen to try and illustrate range and balance both of fantasy drama and production cultures within British broadcasting in the twentieth century. Thus, the case studies proceed chronologically from the early 1950s when BBC was the only broadcaster through the initial broadcasts of new ITV companies, and through the subsequent decades, incorporating major and regional ITV companies and an increasingly commercialized BBC fantasy output.

The drawing together of these different research methods reflects what Ann Gray calls a 'contingent mosaic' approach suitable for the study of television history, 'in which television historians draw together different strands of the production/text/viewer triumvirate according to the particular

needs of the project.’¹⁰⁴ Consequently, this research employs a ‘multiple methods’ approach incorporating archival research, qualitative interviews, and case studies, synthesizing these with textual analysis in order to situate the form and aesthetics of the case studies within the British public service broadcasting model, and their broadcasters.¹⁰⁵ It attempts not to ascribe privilege to any of the individual strands. Consequently, a multiple methods approach may offset some of the dangers of subjectivity in textual analysis and the institutional bias inherent in production studies.

The five chapters map the production ecology and cultures of children’s television fantasy drama across the regulated duopoly by drawing upon archival research carried out at the BBC Written Archive Centre in Reading, and at the University of Bournemouth in its ITA/IBA/Cable Commission archive, which holds the minutes for the ITV Network Children’s Subcommittee. In addition, they use the paratexts that have surrounded television from its earliest days, such as television listings magazines, broadsheet press, textual merchandise including novelisations and comic strips, and industrial and institutional materials like legislation and BBC handbooks. Production studies are developed from qualitative interviews with industry professionals: writers, story editors and heads of department. However, these interviews are also used to extrapolate, in a very minor way, institutional histories for broadcasters that have previously been overlooked. Thus, HTV West’s production practices as described by the company’s staff reveal the operations of the company and the powerful influence

¹⁰⁴ Helen Wheatley, ‘Introduction’ in *Re-Viewing Television History*, 8

¹⁰⁵ I use the term ‘multiple methods’ in preference to ‘mixed methods’. As Symonds and Gorard point out, mixed methods is often used as a synonym for a multimethodological approach across quantitative and qualitative and is, besides, an invalid terminology: Jenny E. Symonds and Stephen Gorard. “The death of mixed methods: Research labels and their casualties.” In *British Educational Research Association (Ed.), BERA Annual Conference, Heriot Watt University, Edinburgh*. 2008.

of Programme Controller and Managing Director, Patrick Dromgoole, in shaping its production culture and the children's fantasy drama it produced in the 1970s.

The use of case studies of BBC and ITV fantasy dramas from successive decades draws together contextual histories and analysis of individual children's programmes and their production, site and style in what Spigel and Mann describe as 'conjunctural histories'.¹⁰⁶ Using case studies to analyse specific fantasy drama productions is useful in several respects: in situating the productions historically, in counteracting any imbalance in research methodologies, and in drawing together subject-adjacent, secondary sources with textual analysis. Textual analysis had for some years been out of favour within the academy but over the last decade, spirited arguments for its reinstatement as part of a television aesthetics have been advanced by Karen Lury,¹⁰⁷ Glen Creeber,¹⁰⁸ and Sarah Cardwell¹⁰⁹. Given children's television's concern with narrative, authorship and quality, and this thesis' more particular focus upon visual style, form and ideology as constituents of fantasy drama, textual analysis is, I suggest, a productive starting point for production case studies.

In drawing together disparate sources and methods, this thesis will attempt to address what I have argued is a lack of sustained academic attention to children's television drama as a whole and fantasy drama more particularly. It will locate fantasy television drama productions for children within their historical, industrial and institutional context, and re-assess their

¹⁰⁶ Wheatley, *Re-Viewing Television History*, 8

¹⁰⁷ Karen Lury 'Reports and Debates: "A Response to John Corner"' in *Screen* (2007) 48 (3): 371-376
doi:10.1093/screen/hjm036

¹⁰⁸ Glen Creeber 'The Joy of Text? Television and Textual Analysis', *Critical Studies in Television*; 2006, Vol. 1 Issue 1, p81

¹⁰⁹ Sarah Cardwell 'Television aesthetics' in *Critical Studies in Television: An International Journal of Television Studies* 1, no. 1 (2006): 72-80.

significance to the children's schedules and the daily cultural life of the nation. Using the texts and contexts of the dramas themselves, it will recover what I argue to be a vital genre within British children's television.

Chapter Two: ‘Magic for Children’: Early Television Fantasy Drama, 1950-1955

Introduction

This chapter establishes the early history of children’s television in Britain. In order to situate early fantasy drama as part of what is necessarily an ‘archaeological rather than a strictly historical procedure’, it analyses the forms and schedules of BBC children’s television from 1948 onwards.¹¹⁰ Drama emerged early on as one of the priorities of the children’s programmes department but children’s television in what Ellis calls the ‘era of scarcity’¹¹¹ was subject to the same technological and medium-specific constraints as drama intended for the evening schedules.¹¹² However, there were further obstacles to the production of children’s television. Its lack of resources, its uncertainty about what children’s television should be, and how the child audience should be addressed all contributed to its uncertain start.

While fantasy drama or telefantasy has become an industrially and culturally recognised genre in the 21st century, within this early and unstable discourse, no such form existed. The fantastic was rather an incidental mode in other genres, such as drama adaptations or puppetry. However, these genres responded to contemporary concerns with the BBC’s identity and the Corporation’s responsibility to the child audience, and the presence of the fantastic could be contingent upon ideas of education, entertainment, and cultural value. Consequently, this chapter traces the history of fantasy as a primary aspect of drama from an early, expansive flowering under Cecil Madden

¹¹⁰ John Caughie ‘Before the Golden Age: Early Television Drama’ in John Corner (ed) *Popular Television in Britain* (London: BFI, 1991), 25

¹¹¹ John Ellis *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 39

¹¹² See Jason Jacobs *The Intimate Screen*

and the divergence of the fantastic into other forms under Freda Lingstrom's tenure. The case study looks more closely at the earliest fantasy dramas produced by the newly instituted Department, *Puck of Pook's Hill* and *Five Children and It*, both 1951.

The history of BBC Children's Programmes

The BBC established the Children's Programmes (Television) department within the wider Television Production department in May 1950 but discussion of its constitution had effectively started several years previously when the television service resumed transmission after World War II. Many of its early doctrines, aesthetics and even programmes were generated out of an already established set of approaches and genres that had been developed through children's radio and the 'piecemeal'¹¹³ children's television pre- and post-war. These intermittently scheduled programmes for children were produced by adult-oriented departments rather than dedicated children's producers and had restarted when BBC television recommenced transmission in 1946. They persisted, with some regularisation in 1948, until 1950 when the children's department was constituted and allocated an official, regular and more expansive place in the schedules. These pre-existing discourses of public service broadcasting and children's media working in concert with new and developing conceptions of the home, the state and modernity framed subsequent debates about children's television: what it should entail and how it should be produced; how it should conceive of its child audience; and how that child audience should interact with it. These intersecting concerns of, and about, television and its cultural value, audience reception and childhood inflected the topography of BBC children's

¹¹³ BBC WAC T16/45/1 BBC Children's Television: CP Policy (post 54) otherwise undated

television and subsequently its approach to children's television drama, and fantastic drama in particular.

From 1946, children's television programming was transmitted weekly under the title *For the Children* or *Children's Hour* between 4 and 5pm on Sundays, and was organised by Mary Adams, Head of Talks for the developing Television Service. A year later, Adams proposed the expansion of BBC children's television provision. Her plans for the extension of the sparse children's television programming and what a dedicated children's service should entail were detailed in her memo, 'Suggestions for a 'Children's Afternoon'. In it, she stated that although Saturday afternoons would be preferable scheduling, 'there is certainly a case for devoting the whole of Sunday afternoon to children'. However the plans for extension in scheduling and genre were not simply to attract a child audience to the slowly expanding medium of television. 'There is,' said Adams, 'growing evidence that children look in and have to be restrained from doing so in the evenings. Thus there's a good argument for providing specially [sic] suitable programmes during one or two of the afternoons when children are free to look.'¹¹⁴ Children's television was not only constructed as a good in and of itself, Adams also suggested that providing specialised, child-oriented television would satisfy children's appetite for television enough to deter them from viewing in a manner which was unhealthy for them. This was as much a cultural anxiety as an institutional one: in 1951, Sir Malcolm Sargent, the famous composer and conductor, opined, 'To let children watch television when they like is the same as to put a jam-pot in front of them when you want them to take cod liver oil.'¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ BBC WAC T16/45/1 8th August 1947, Mrs Mary Adams 'Suggestions for a 'Children's Afternoon'

¹¹⁵ 'Things Said' *The Children's Newspaper* April 21st 1951 <http://new.lookandlearn.com/childrens-newspaper/CN510421-006.pdf> (accessed January 6th, 2016)

Thus, children's television and more importantly its moderation was being constructed as part of a moral and cultural good, not just as the provision of a public broadcasting service, although this would remain key, but as a preventative for children accessing television that was unsuitable and therefore harmful to them. There was therefore within the BBC a recognised need for a particularised schedule for children that not only promoted public service values but protected its child audience. Cecil McGivern, Television Programme Director at the time, stated, 'Children are fascinated by Television. The correspondence protesting against children being lured away from Sunday School by Television testifies to this...' ¹¹⁶ McGivern then was not only concerned about provision for the child audience which is reported as an enthralling medium, especially to children, but also about where that child audience was situated and what they should be doing, with Television or in quotidian life. Children themselves were being mediated through the structure and availability of children's television, reinforcing the concept of BBC Children's Television as a service which worked 'to construct a normative ethos for the child and to connect the child to an external world in an active form of citizenship and public participation.' ¹¹⁷

This philosophical construct arose out of an already existing discourse of childhood, education and the connections between private and public, domestic and state that had developed in the early years of the BBC and its achievements in radio broadcasting. While necessarily abbreviated given the truncated schedules of early television, children's television aimed to incorporate as many of the genres familiar from radio and adult television as possible whilst also emphasising the Reithian approach to cultural enlightenment; but despite Adams'

¹¹⁶ Home *Into the Box of Delights*, 16

¹¹⁷ Oswell *Television, Childhood and the Home*, 49

ambitions, pre-1950 *For the Children/Children's Hour* can be seen as contingent programming. While the Royal Charter mandated provision for children as well as a wider duty to 'inform, educate and entertain', Adams' memo stated that 'at present, the only time set aside for children's viewing is the first part of Sunday afternoon transmission,' adding that 'Sometimes as little as ten minutes a week is planned directly for children.'¹¹⁸ The reason for this brevity and scheduling was part and parcel of the restricted television broadcasting hours of the early BBC television service and the constraints upon its resources. Like Britain as a whole, the BBC and the Television Department was, in the wake of World War II, still recovering. The Annual Accounts for 1947-48 detail staff still returning to the BBC from overseas forces and a year later, the Accounts state that 'The Governors recognise that, during these post-war years, television has to take its place in the general programme of national reconstruction.'¹¹⁹ The BBC and Television Service within which Adams is trying to construct a children's television service is very much a recovering institution with attendant historical paucities of budget, space and technology. This period qualifies as what John Ellis categorises as an 'era of scarcity which lasted for most countries until the late 1970s or early 80s.'¹²⁰ The origins of the Children's department must therefore be understood within this context but also within the framework of public service broadcasting which constituted so much of the Royal Charter legislation as well as the early institutional influence of John Reith: ultimately children's television is conceptualised as, and throughout most of its existence, struggles with its image as poor but worthy: the Cinderella service.

¹¹⁸ BBC WAC T16/45/1 'Suggestions for a 'Children's Afternoon' Mrs Mary Adams August 8th 1947

¹¹⁹ BBC Annual Accounts, 1947-48, 3

¹²⁰ Ellis *Seeing Things*, 39

Despite its peripheral status, from 1950 children's television was accorded its own department from May 1950, developing from the ad hoc Sunday *Children's Hour* to a departmentalised daily schedule, produced for children by specialised producers. The administration of the department was uncertain in its first few months of its existence, and so, by corollary, was its production culture and its approach to the child audience. The department was headed first by Richmond Postgate, previously Head of BBC Schools Broadcasting, who was one of the earliest architects of the idea that 'children's programmes are likely to produce the whole television service in microcosm'.¹²¹ Postgate's tenure was however both brief and largely undocumented. Although the department started producing children's television from May 1950, Postgate declared in a talk for the Latin American service that 'the slenderness of the resources available, and the innumerable technical and organisational difficulties have tended to make producers concentrate more on what is easier and cheaper to produce in television or on what is distinctly more suitable to television than to any other medium. Consequently, there is a great deal of puppetry; puppetry bring [sic] the possibilities of drama, is not too expensive, and its conventions which limits its acceptance among adults seem to arouse little criticism among children.'¹²² Postgate's children's television then developed around its deficiencies but still highlighted the importance of drama. Little evidence remains of the production instigated under Postgate but presumably it was under his administration that such children's favourites as *Watch with Mother* developed.

When Postgate departed in September 1950, his replacement, Cecil Madden, almost immediately initiated an intensive and particularised drama production strategy. Previously a BBC

¹²¹ BBC WAC T16/45/1 'Mr Postgate's Talk on Television Children's Programmes for Translation and Broadcast in Latin American Service' (sent to Tel. P.O. 26/07/50), 2

¹²² Ibid

Programme Organiser, Madden had definite and ambitious plans for Children's Programmes, and particularly its dramatic output. Within a year of its formation, the Children's Programmes department was producing at least eleven drama serials throughout the year, including critically acclaimed productions like *The Railway Children* (BBC, 1951), and the contemporary press heralded Madden as one of the pioneers of this television seriality. In an article about Children's Programmes 'under the direction of Cecil Madden, one of television's earliest and most inventive programme practitioners,' *The Manchester Guardian* stated '[a]nother good idea is the television serial, starting on December 12, of "Little Women". Television, one feels, has always offered opportunities for serial stories, and perhaps the Children's Hour will lead the way in showing what can be done.'¹²³ *Little Women* was subsequently the first serial on British television, and the production of various other serials for both children's and adult schedules quickly followed.

Despite Madden's contributions to children's television, his tenure as Acting Head of Children's Programmes only lasted eight months. He was displaced, allegedly disappointedly, by the appointment of Freda Lingstrom as Head of Department in April 1951. *The Daily Express* declared, 'News of the appointment caused surprise among TV executives, for it had been widely assumed that, after eight months in the job, Mr Madden would be confirmed in his appointment.'¹²⁴ Madden might have been regarded as a certainty by the press but David Buckingham's historical analysis states that while 'Madden had both expanded the service and centred its output [...] he was viewed with suspicion by the BBC hierarchy as someone with too great a leaning towards 'theatre people' and a drama-centred

¹²³ Our Radio Critic 'Children's Hour' in *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959), Dec 6, 1950, 3

¹²⁴ 'Woman Aged 57 to run Junior TV' in *The Daily Express*, 5th April 1951, 1

‘repertory company’ approach.’¹²⁵ Ironically, Madden’s ‘leaning’ towards light entertainment, regarded with such suspicion by the BBC, had been the foundation of his previous success within the Corporation, producing early show-business spectacles for television such as *Here's Looking At You!* (BBC, 1936) and later the magazine programme, *Picture Play* (BBC, 1936-52).

Despite these associations, Madden had clearly given some thought to television drama as a developing form. Two years before he was appointed to Children’s Programmes, Madden, in an article for the BBC Quarterly, speculated about ‘where television drama is going, whether it aims to be a photographed stage play, a competitor to the film, or an illustrated broadcast. The truth probably belongs somewhere between them all.’ Citing this article, Caughie describes Madden as ‘very much more a “television man” than [then BBC Director of Drama] Val Gielgud’.¹²⁶ Madden’s considered, hybridised approach to television drama may counter, at least in part, the accusation that he was too invested in light entertainment to be a drama producer, an argument reinforced by documents in the BBC archive in which he attempted to articulate and produce a new canon of children’s television drama. This production strategy may, however, suggest an alternative reason for Madden’s replacement as Acting Head. His plans for children’s drama might have proved too extravagant for the fledgling Television Service and, while his production policy was ambitious, it had an extended and rigid timeline and was rather less well-defined than Lingstrom’s. ‘We began but without time to pursue it,’ reported Joanna Spicer, Madden’s successor as Programme Organiser, about an exchange with Madden, ‘a rather muddled conversation about the importance of deciding the proportion of

¹²⁵ Buckingham et al *Children’s Television in Britain*, 18

¹²⁶ Caughie *Television Drama*, 41

“entertainment” and “enlightenment” ingredients in Children’s Programmes.’¹²⁷

However ‘muddled’ Madden might have been on the balance between educational and entertaining - and the publicised ‘hint that the children’s programmes are to become “more educational”’¹²⁸ under Lingstrom might be an indication of where he failed to meet with BBC expectations - he was very clear about drama’s importance to Children’s Programmes. Spicer’s report to the Director of Television continued, ‘On the question of the serial dramatization of books, Mr Madden points out that this is pioneering work and that ample time must be given to the staff producing the serials to build the foundations of this activity well.’¹²⁹ An attached document laid out Madden’s policy ‘for the regular production of series of dramatized books’:

A dramatised book serial of eight episodes will take up to two months preparatory work, followed by two months production and a week or so clearing up at the end. Mr Madden states that during this, say, 4½ months, the producer concerned is not available for any other work. Because of the length of this period, he thinks it wise to devote two people to each serial so that there need be no interruption from illness or other accident. He also believes that both should not be of the same sex. The plan for serials therefore imposes a pattern on the employment of Mr Madden’s staff for the year.¹³⁰

Drama production might have benefited from this structured, segregated approach but it seems that BBC management felt that the Corporation did not. Anna Home cites a memo between Madden and Cecil McGivern in which Madden was ‘castigated

¹²⁷ BBC WAC T16/45/1 ‘Television Children’s Programmes’, Joanna Spicer to George Barnes, 15th Jan 1951

¹²⁸ C. A. Lejeune ‘Television’ in *The Observer* April 15, 1951, 6

¹²⁹ BBC WAC T16/45/1 ‘Television Children’s Programmes’, Joanna Spicer to George Barnes, 15th Jan 1951

¹³⁰ BBC WAC T16/45/1 Document attached to memo between Spicer and Barnes of 15th Jan 1951 (as above), ‘Television Children’s Programmes: Answers to D.Tel.’s questions of 28th November’, undated

in no uncertain terms for great extravagance' in requesting studio time,¹³¹ and the attachment to Spicer's report concluded, 'The programme policy on which Mr Madden has embarked, for the regular production of series of dramatized books, puts a heavy strain on the production group.'¹³² Clearly, this production policy took up a lot of man-hours and studio time that might otherwise have been used, and Madden appears not to have been able to institute it before he was replaced by Lingstrom.

Despite this, it was under Madden's 'pioneering' tenure that several drama serials, including the case studies for this chapter, began production. These expansive, hybridised productions with distinct elements of 'showmanship' and spectacle go some way to extending Jacob's deconstruction of early television drama as 'static and theatrical'¹³³ to 1950s programming for children and suggest that a reappraisal of early television drama for children, and Madden's influence upon its form and scheduling, is due.

Puck of Pook's Hill (BBC, 1951)

Puck of Pook's Hill, adapted from Rudyard Kipling's novel into a six-episode serial, was transmitted live in September and October 1951 from Studio D in Lime Grove, but production began in March of that year, a month before Madden's departure. The production file reveals that, from scripting to transmission, *Puck of Pook's Hill* took approximately eight months to make; far longer than the four and a half months which Madden had suggested his dramatized serial productions

¹³¹ Home, *Into the Box of Delights*, 28

¹³² BBC WAC T16/45/1 Document attached to memo between Spicer and Barnes of 15th Jan 1951 (as above), 'Television Children's Programmes: Answers to D.Tel.'s questions of 28th November', undated

¹³³ Jacobs *The Intimate Screen*, 3

would take.¹³⁴ Production may have been delayed, however, by the departure of Madden and the institution of Lingstrom from May 1951, as it also delayed the production of *Five Children and It*. A month prior to his departure, Madden contacted the producer Matthew Forsyth to discuss the production which he described as ‘a very interesting idea’, although he suggested it might run into the problems which haunted those producing children’s television:

One of the great troubles of Children’s Television is the lack of advance rehearsal on the floor and the fact that rehearsals have to end at 4 p.m., which makes for very little time with the cameras.¹³⁵

Madden ended on a more encouraging note: ‘If you feel these points can be overcome and scripts simplified, by all means let’s discuss the matter further.’¹³⁶ As a department Head, Madden was clearly aware of, and involved with, the production of children’s drama under his administration, despite its problems.

In *Puck of Pook’s Hill*, Puck, ‘the oldest Old thing in England’, shows children, Dan and Una, the history of England by invoking characters and major events from previous centuries. Forsyth’s production recreated English history and landscape in studio using a three-camera set-up, but used specially filmed telecine inserts as well as library stock to expand the drama and to create the fantastic.¹³⁷ Location filming for the second episode took place on 20th and 21st September 1951 at Mymms Wash, Middlesex.¹³⁸ Telecine scripts for this episode show four separate sequences to be shot of the children’s first encounter with Sir Richard, Richard and Dan’s conversation whilst on

¹³⁴ BBC WAC T2/129/1 Vere Shepstone to Matthew Forsyth, 7th March 1951,

¹³⁵ Ibid

¹³⁶ Ibid

¹³⁷ BBC WAC T2/129/1 Equipment list, undated

¹³⁸ BBC WAC T2/129/2 Matthew Forsyth to S. Mortimer, 3rd September 1951

horseback, Richard's combat with Hugh, and a shot exterior to Lime Grove of an elderly Richard, making them fairly extensive within a thirty minute episode. This, in addition to library footage, suggests that while it is impossible to judge average shot length in the absence of studio scripts or extant footage, Puck may have been a relatively mobile and hybridised production, much in the vein of Madden's vision of television drama.

The spectacle and hybridity of *Puck of Pook's Hill* were reinforced by the designs of Lawrence Broadhouse. His elaborate designs created both mise-en-scene, through sets for medieval castles, open moorlands, and Roman camps down to the legion's signum, and models and in-studio visual effects which were used to create the illusion of smoke signals being sent across moorland. Broadhouse built a table-top miniature of the landscape in planed perspective, and smoke effects were fed through at different depths within the model and filmed with a slow motion film camera.¹³⁹ (See Fig. 1)

¹³⁹ BBC WAC T2/129/2 Studio floor plans for *Puck of Pook's Hill* tx 23rd Sept, 7th and 9th Oct 1951

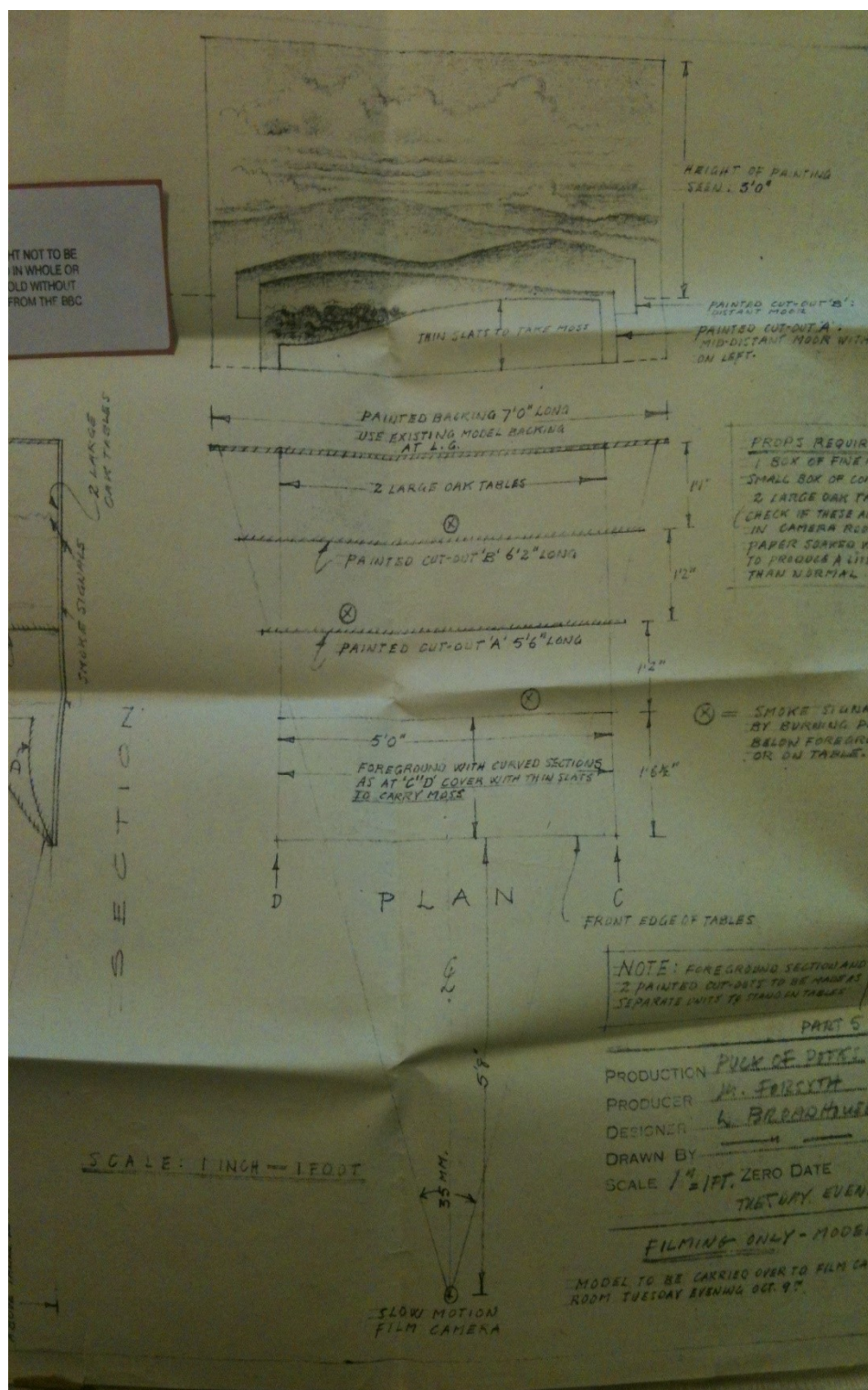


Fig. 1 BBC WAC T2/129/2 9th October 1951, *Puck of Pook's Hill* (Episode 5)

However, the discourses of media hybridisation and the spectacular which were evident in the production's aesthetic and form were reinforced elsewhere. Not only did *Puck of Pook's Hill* reflect Madden's concept of a composite media text, it also featured 'Wee' Georgie Brown in the starring role.

Georgie Brown was a well-known, long-standing variety artist who, as a small person, specialised in playing schoolchildren in a music hall act. Brown appeared in *Puck* as a child-sized adult, both countering and reinforcing the associations of spectacularity, show-business and the uncanny inherent in his previous music hall roles. Wood's fame may, however, have come with its own problems. One of the key costs in an already expensive production was Wood's fee which, at £63,¹⁴⁰ was nearly three times the amount received by any other performer but, in light of telegrams in the production file which indicate that Madden negotiated personally with Wood, it seems likely that Madden was aware of this transaction and approved it.¹⁴¹

Under Madden's influence, *Puck of Pook's Hill* was a hybrid production with strong associations with theatrical 'show-business' and an aesthetic which constructed drama as inter-mediated and spectacular. While it used elements of theatre, such as elaborate studio sets and the casting of 'Wee' Georgie Wood as Puck, it also deliberately attempted to suture together and more importantly into each other live studio transmission and other inter-media elements, such as extensive film shooting, model miniatures and physical effects, to create a complex televisual text.

¹⁴⁰ BBC WAC T2/129/1 List of performers' fees for *Puck of Pook's Hill*, undated

¹⁴¹ BBC WAC T2/129/1 Telegram from Cecil Madden to 'Wee' Georgie Wood about performer's fee, undated

Five Children and It (BBC, 1951)

Five Children and It, an adaptation of E. Nesbit's children's classic in which five Edwardian children discover a Psammead who can grant wishes, was, like *Puck of Pook's Hill*, oriented around the fantastic. Although it was transmitted under Freda Lingstrom's administration just as *Puck* had been, it nevertheless fits into the schema of early children's television drama under Madden as a television production with a spectacular and hybridised narrative and aesthetic and associations with theatricality. Produced by Dorothea Brooking, only just beginning her illustrious career in children's television drama in 1951, the drama was shown as a two-part serial on Sunday 17th and 24th June 1951.¹⁴²

The production history opens with the arrangements for an extensive flying sequence created through suturing telecine material shot on location into studio shots; while the sequence itself was shown in the first episode, the cost was defrayed against the entire serial.¹⁴³ The fantastic and spectacular therefore not only constituted the aesthetic of the serial but also a significant part of the £500 budget, and contemporary press reports suggest that genre was identified as a potential attraction for viewers. *The Manchester Guardian* reported, 'Dorothea Brooking [...] will produce on Sunday and on June 24 a two-part version of *Five Children and It*, another story by Mrs Nesbit which has an element of fantasy and which should be interesting to handle on television.'¹⁴⁴

Brooking handled the element of fantasy through a complex spectacle of media hybridity, editing together film inserts, studio filming, and theatrical effects, most notably to create the illusion that the children have been given the ability to fly. In a

¹⁴² BBC WAC T2/49 Dorothea Brooking to Don Smith, April 5th, 1951

¹⁴³ BBC WAC T2/49 Unattributed memo, undated

¹⁴⁴ Our Radio Critic 'New Projects', *The Manchester Guardian* June 13, 1951, 3

letter dated April 1951, Brooking stated that she had asked Anthony de Lotbiniere, a film editor on Children's Newsreel and previously a BBC Assistant Film Librarian, 'if he knew of any stock library shots of countryside taken from the air.' Lotbiniere suggested that if the production could charter a helicopter, they could create the film themselves and consequently make the spectacular a deliberate and particularised element of the serial.¹⁴⁵ Charles Gardner, the BBC's Air Correspondent, subsequently advised Brooking

British European Airways think that it will be quite easy to fix up your helicopter filming. [...] Some time in May I expect that Television Newsreel will be flying along the route in the helicopter to get shots for release when the service opens on June 1st. I should think that whoever covers this story for TV Newsreel could probably also shoot your requirements during the journey. This is merely a suggestion and I'm sure that if you want a special flight B.E.A. can fix it.¹⁴⁶

Brooking decided on a special flight so that 'the helicopter could hover over the church tower, which would enable us to cut into the film studio shot of the children actually flying down on to it.'¹⁴⁷ To achieve this film studio shot, Brooking negotiated with Kirby's Flying Ballets company, 'Producer of Peter Pan Flying Effects, Somersaulting [sic], Diving & Auditorium Flying', to provide four 'solo machines', more usually used in theatres.¹⁴⁸ These were temporarily installed in Lime Grove so that the child performers could simulate flight for filming within the studio. Brooking thereby produced an extensive filmed sequence, both on location and in studio, which worked

¹⁴⁵ BBC WAC T2/49 Dorothea Brooking to Don Smith, 5th April 1951

¹⁴⁶ BBC WAC T2/49 Charles Gardner to Dorothea Brooking, undated. Charles Gardner was the reporter who gave a memorable if criticised live broadcast on the Battle of Britain in 1940: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/people/52/68.shtml> (Accessed 29/01/14)

¹⁴⁷ BBC WAC T2/49 Dorothea Brooking to Don Smith, 5th April 1951

¹⁴⁸ BBC WAC T2/49 Joseph Kirby (Kirby's Flying Ballets) to Dorothea Brooking, 12th April 1951

syncretically to produce the illusion that the children had flown across the English countryside only to become stranded at the top of a church tower.

Production documents make clear Brooking's desire to create and transmit a convincing, composite flying sequence; however, through institutional synergy and the dedicated, innovative approach of the production team, the sequence developed into a collage of in-studio visual effects and dedicated aerial photography film to create a hybridised spectacle. The filming sequence was interlaced more securely through the designs of Lawrence Broadhouse, once again contributing to the aesthetic and form of children's drama production under Madden. His instructions for this sequence required two sets: the first, for the children's take-off, was a basic grassy bank with a skycloth in the background but the second, in which the children would 'land', called for a church tower set, backed by a skycloth, and surrounded by treetops. For this, Broadhouse suggested that the studio floor be covered by 'a net suspended horizontally about 6" above floor with the greenery laid on it and stuck into it.'¹⁴⁹

BBC inter-departmental collaboration and the 'pioneering' ethos Madden identifies for drama production, as well as production staff committed to innovation in editing, form and aesthetic, gave Brooking the opportunity to create a truly fantastic journey. It also allowed Madden to establish the 'foundations' of a canon of children's television drama which combined seriality, spectacle and hybridity.

Children's Programmes, 1951-56

Despite these early achievements in formal and aesthetic hybridity and his success in originating seriality in British

¹⁴⁹ BBC WAC T2/49 Furniture & Property Requirements form, May 26th, 1951

television, Madden's record as Head of Children's Programmes was not enough to keep him in the post. Part of this may have been attributable to his belief that 'showmanship' was an essential element of children's television, an attitude that was growing increasingly untenable within the BBC as a protectionist and educational discourse grew up around the child audience. Madden's alleged predisposition towards theatre and show business was a problem for the BBC, suggesting that while hybridization in media and aesthetic advanced children's television drama significantly under Madden, it also had the potential to vitiate (or be perceived to vitiate) BBC public service values and the protectionist sphere of BBC children's television.

It was perhaps to counter this potential falling off in paternalism and public service values that Madden was dismissed in favour of Lingstrom, who, as a previous Assistant Head of Schools Broadcasting, was qualified to bring a more worthy and educational bent to BBC Children's. (A similar emphasis led to a commensurate decline in fantasy under Edward Barnes, 1978-86: see Chapter Four) This was allegedly something of an upset within the BBC. Cecil Madden had been acting Head of Children's Television from September 1950, and was popularly tipped to be confirmed in the post. Lingstrom might have been an outsider for the job but she had extensive and valuable experience of children's media, having created 'Listen with Mother' for BBC Radio and co-created and produced Andy Pandy for *Watch with Mother*. Her previous work in educational broadcasting and as a children's author may have been seen as a potentially valuable correctives to Madden's previous spectacular and profligate approach.

Contemporary press reports certainly seemed to view Lingstrom's appointment in this light. While *The Daily Express*, as previously stated, reported that the news 'caused surprise

among TV executives, for it had been widely assumed that, after eight months in the job, Mr Madden would be confirmed in his appointment,' the article also archly stated that Lingstrom was 'said officially to have "experience of TV"'. Further, it reported, as did other press articles, that "'Miss Lingstrom has no TV set – but [...] will have to get one now.'¹⁵⁰ Subsequent reports suggested that reservations were not solely the province of the press: a mere four days after the BBC announced the change of management, a *Daily Mail* article stated that '[t]he Televiewers Association, representing 10,000 children of members throughout the country, have protested to the BBC because Mr Cecil Madden has been replaced by 57-year-old Miss Freda Lingstrom as Head of Children's Television Hour.'¹⁵¹

Little seemed to come of the protest but further newspaper articles maintained an attitude of circumspection and also suggested the specifically educational direction that the press thought that BBC Children's Programmes would take under Lingstrom's administration. Collie Knox at the *Daily Mail* stated explicitly that the BBC

did not confirm Cecil Madden as head of Children's Hours not because they did not consider that he had done great work, but for the same reason the French said we shot Admiral Byng: "Pour encourager les autres." They felt he had brought children's vision to its required entertainment level... and that now education must begin.' Knox indicated the strength of their convictions and their disapprobation about the new direction of the Children's Programmes department under Lingstrom stating that '[c]hildren are not ready for vision education. Madden brought in a vast audience of

¹⁵⁰ 'Woman Aged 57 to run Junior TV' in *The Daily Express*, 5th April 1951, 1

¹⁵¹ 'Children protest at TV change' in *The Daily Mail*, April 9th, 1951, 3

youngsters. They will now be scared off. Vision will become important to education, but not for at least ten years.¹⁵²

The Daily Mirror did not seem to agree. Just two months later, an article titled ‘When the Teacher is a TV Screen’¹⁵³ conflated the Children’s Programmes department and the BBC Schools department, despite the fact that BBC Schools for television would not start broadcasting until six years later and what Burton Paulu described as the ‘sharp distinction [...] drawn between instructional programs for in-school use, and [children’s] programs designed for entertainment at home.’¹⁵⁴ *The Daily Mirror* suggested that ‘TV education is just round the corner’ before stating that

Mr George Barnes, head of Britain’s television output, looks to Freda Lingstrom to bring TV education to Britain’s schoolchildren.

Three months ago, he plucked Miss Lingstrom from her post as Assistant Head of Schools Broadcasting, gave her this huge hush-hush job of planning visual education.

For in Schools Broadcasting, Miss Lingstrom had been directing the present daily lessons which are beamed to 22,000 schools. Experience gained on sound education must now be adapted to vision.¹⁵⁵

Whether or not Lingstrom had been specifically appointed to develop educational programming within Children’s Programmes— and certainly there is no evidence that she contributed to the development off this whilst she was in charge

¹⁵² ‘Collie Knox: A Technical Switch at Alexandra Palace’ in *The Daily Mail*, May 29th, 1951, 2

¹⁵³ ‘When the teacher is a TV screen’ in *The Daily Mirror*, July 3rd, 1951, 2

¹⁵⁴ Burton Paulu *British Broadcasting: Radio and Television in the United Kingdom* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), 307

¹⁵⁵ ‘When the teacher is a TV screen’ in *The Daily Mirror*, July 3rd, 1951, 2

of the Children's Programmes department – the register in which she discussed the children's programmes produced under her aegis was often connotatively educative. Her interactions with the press and other institutions articulated the Children's Programmes department as one that would create programming that, even when entertaining, would promote education, information, and shared cultural values of democracy, fairness and moral and intellectual progression.

The anxiety about children's television and education seemed only to increase as the discussion about the introduction of commercial television intensified. It was the focus of a Conference of Educational Associations in 1955, at which the 'Society of Film Teachers, which has concerned itself with the effect of cinema on children, is now turning to the problems of the smaller screen,' with discussions titled "'The Challenge of Television'".¹⁵⁶

Taking all of this into consideration, it is not surprising that under Lingstrom's regime, the output appeared to become more educationally-oriented than the more dramatic inclination it had under Madden. Under Lingstrom's tenure, popular culture was regarded with distrust and this included the hybridised dramatic spectacles produced under Madden. While fantastic elements remained as part of the productions, output became markedly less 'fantastic' in proportion, and were more oriented towards the domestic and more easily produced and budgeted puppetry and drama adaptations of historical classics which could be more easily produced within the studio, in addition to the first long-running drama serial on television, a proto-soap opera, *The Appleyards* (BBC, 1952-57). A particularly interesting reversion to the dramatic form of the theatrical excerpt and adaptation can be inferred from the series, *How Does It End?* (BBC, 1952, prod. Naomi Capon) which dramatized scenes

¹⁵⁶ 'One Hour a Day as Maximum?' *The Manchester Guardian*, October

from classic novels, in order to build suspense, save money and construct BBC Children's Television as a department closely allied to the values of high culture and education as much as entertainment. The novels from which scenes were selected bear this didactic purpose out: *The Three Musketeers*, *What Katy Did*, *Westward Ho!*, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Northanger Abbey*; perhaps not children's literature by a modern understanding but certainly familiar from contemporary education.

However, an additional factor which may have constrained the production of fantasy drama were its economics, particularly as developed by Madden. *Man in Armour*, a fantasy drama which started life under Madden in 1951 and ended in 1954 under Lingstrom, was developed from an idea by Harry Dubens, a theatrical agent, starred one of his clients, Bruce Gordon, and used a substantial number of film inserts and in-studio effects and sets to create effects. By 1954, the royalties payments to Dubens were taking their toll, and the budget had been pared down to the bone. The production about an immortal knight and his nemesis, Sappho the Wizard, now relied upon stock film, props and sets to off-set costs.¹⁵⁷ The spectacular fantasy drama produced by Madden may have been too rich for Lingstrom's blood, both aesthetically and financially. As a consequence, the fantastic, rather than remaining an approach to drama, became channelled into other, more economic modes, such as puppetry, pace Postgate.

However, Lingstrom's openly declared opposition to 'any hint of commercialism' suggests that the decline in fantasy drama was as much a matter of taste and protectionism as economic prudence.¹⁵⁸ Thus, while children's television drama persisted and even flourished under Lingstrom, its use of genre and form

¹⁵⁷ BBC WAC T2/95/2 Furniture, Properties & Drape Requirements form, June 28th 1954

¹⁵⁸ Buckingham et al *Children's Television in Britain*, 20

responded to institutional pressures and constructions of the child audience and cultural value, even before the introduction of commercial television. It may be surmised that fantasy was not only seen as ‘popular’ but as antithetical to educational values. When it was used under Lingstrom, it seems to have been carefully constrained by budget, mode and form; suggesting fantasy rather than spectacularising it. While there was one notable fantasy drama, *The Silver Swan*, as an early timeslip drama, didactic values were built into its depictions of history. McGown and Docherty describe it as ‘undoubtedly a very Look and Learn-styled semi-educational serial’, and suggest that it may have been wholly studio-bound, stating that ‘[a]lthough the scripting may have been innovative, conditions at Lime Grove were as before.’¹⁵⁹ Thus, when fantasy was used under Lingstrom, it was always framed as part of an educational and protectionist rationale.

The intimate screen?: approaches to early children’s television drama

Even from the earliest days, drama was identified by Mary Adams as one of the primary elements of any children’s television service. This view was shared institutionally: Joanna Spicer, Programmes Organiser, wrote to George Barnes, Director of Television, about the children’s television she had watched personally, describing the drama productions as having ‘the character of ‘tell me a story’ in acted form’. Of the drama serials *Little Women*, *Man in Armour* and *The Railway Children* (all 1950-51), she stated ‘I don’t consider these serials to be true drama at all: and I am sure true drama is something very important to children. [...] I would like to enter a plea that over the year, true drama should find a place and that we should

¹⁵⁹ Alistair McGown and Mark J. Docherty, *The Hill and Beyond: Children’s Television Drama – An Encyclopedia* (London: BFI, 2003), 16

not be content with serialised story-telling.’¹⁶⁰ The importance of drama to children has been a constant throughout the history of BBC Children’s television, regardless of what form it assumes. As late as 2014, Anna Home, formerly head of BBC Children’s and Chair of the Children’s Media Foundation, declared of her time as a BBC drama producer, ‘it seemed to me, and it still seems to me, that childhood is a very brief time and [...] it’s a very impressionable time and you need to be talked to, as a child, in your own terms and in your own emotional terms. There’s wonderful drama made by adults, obviously, for adults, for a wider audience, but it doesn’t specifically address the concerns and interests of the child.’¹⁶¹

However constant the primacy of drama within the department in the 1950s, there are obvious specificities in approaches to production, form and genre. Drama was represented through several historicised modes in these early production and policy documents, operating under the constraints of early television technology and lack of studio space: plays, whether theatrical or live transmissions of studio productions, or puppetry and animation. Although serialised items were not common to television, they were suggested within children’s television as early as 1949 and the first ever serial on British television, *Little Women*, was produced for children’s television under Madden in 1950. In a memo to Adams about the Autumn schedules, producer Peter Thompson lists general objectives for children’s television, among which is the ‘development of serial items’ which he identifies as lacking, a lack later addressed by Madden’s robust production strategy of serialisation and literary dramatization.¹⁶² This production strategy of drama serialisation was then perpetuated in a different generic vein by Lingstrom. In multiple cases, children’s drama serials would be repeated in

¹⁶⁰ BBC WAC T16/45/1 Mrs Spicer to D. Tel. ‘Children’s Programmes’ 10th May 1951

¹⁶¹ Anna Home, interview with author, London, June 21st, 2013, 9

¹⁶² BBC WAC T16/45/1 Peter Thompson to H.Tel. T. ‘Autumn Schedules: Children’s Interests’ June 30th 1949

primetime for adult audiences. It may be argued that children's television fostered television forms that came to characterise the medium. Children's television narrative drama was separated into several categories, appearing in documents primarily as plays, adaptations, serials or films, reflecting a discourse that was based primarily upon taste and format rather than genre or audience appeal, although these would come to be more keenly appreciated when commercial television started transmission.

In a memo, Adams advocates for the institution of the BBC Puppet Theatre, stating that though it 'would be relatively costly' to establish, as a long-term investment it would enable the BBC to produce 'puppet dramatization of stories like *Baba [sic]*, *Orlando*, *Wurzel Gummidge*' and 'to commission puppet adaptations of stories and plays'.¹⁶³ She also proposes that original puppet plays could be commissioned, and thereby provide an avenue for drama productions. Puppetry is therefore seen as a method of adapting literature and achieving the fantastic economically and effectively and within the framework of the education/entertainment dichotomy inherent in the BBC Children's output. Animation, although rudimentary and often intended as illustration to story-telling, was also promoted as a valuable form of drama and adaptation throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Narrative drama was not confined to one mode of production for the early BBC Children's Department and production of drama and the mode in which it was produced was contingent upon costs and resources of space and time.

Richmond Postgate echoed Adams' belief in the possibilities of puppetry as a key mode for drama in his radio talk on children's television, stating 'puppetry bring[s] the possibilities of drama, is not too expensive, and its conventions, which limits its acceptance among adults, seem to arouse little criticism among

¹⁶³ BBC WAC T16/45/1, Mary Adams June 3rd 1948

children.’¹⁶⁴ The use of puppetry as a narrative production strategy for television clearly taps successfully into a pre-existing appeal and could operate as a form of economic and child-centred drama. ‘Puppeteers reigned supreme in the 1950s,’ declares Hartley, ‘not least because of Freda Lingstrom’s great love of them.’¹⁶⁵ Lingstrom, Head of Children’s Television between 1951 and 1956, was the co-creator of *Andy Pandy* and several other puppet serials such as *The Woodentops* and *Bill and Ben* which appeared first in ‘For the Children’ and later in the *Watch with Mother* miscellany programme. Several of the alumni of *Watch with Mother* are articulated as fantastic in their own right; a contemporary *New York Times* report on the potential sale of British children’s television to the States framed both *Andy Pandy* and *The Flowerpot Men* as fantasy television.¹⁶⁶

This suggests puppetry as a valuable form of proto-drama in early children’s television; certainly puppetry forms a large part of the children’s output even to the present day and contributes meaningfully to the construction of fantasy drama throughout BBC Children’s Television, even if it does not comprise the mode entirely. BBC Children’s ground-breaking return to the Sunday serial slot with an adaptation of C.S. Lewis’s *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* (1988) could not have been achieved without the animatronic puppetry in conjunction with live-action location filming which allowed them to bring Aslan, and Narnia itself, to the screen. Puppetry allows not only for the representation of the fantastic as well as the everyday at a fraction of the cost of live action productions, it also creates a fantastic mode within everyday television. It is moreover a mode particularised for children and could be used as part of an

¹⁶⁴ BBC WAC T16/45/1 ‘Mr Postgate’s Talk on Television Children’s Programmes for Translation and Broadcast in Latin American Service’, 2

¹⁶⁵ Ian Hartley *Goodnight Children Everywhere* (Southborough, Kent: Midas Books, 1983), 93

¹⁶⁶ ‘B. B. C.’s Television for Tiny Tots So Successful U. S. May Imitate It: Special to The New York Times’ in *The New York Times* January 10th 1955, 20.

aesthetic, as Tat Wood suggests, that would identify early BBC children's television as a brand and a genre connected with, but distanced from, domestic and quotidian reality.¹⁶⁷ Thus, while Andy Pandy represented children at play and the Woodentops functioned through the fantastic mode to represent the British nuclear family, Bill and Ben constructed a fantasy world accessible only to children, and Gordon Murray's *A Rubovian Legend* could create a fairy-tale kingdom, in which dragons and magic still existed alongside the narrative conventions more familiar from adventure novels and serials such as *The Prisoner of Zenda*. Most of the productions outside *Watch with Mother* were however still being transmitted live rather than filmed, as indicated by a 1959 Quarterly Report which stated that 'a start was made with film-puppetry in The Dragon's Hiccups, which was pre-filmed in the puppet theatre workshop with noticeable technical advantages.'¹⁶⁸ Indeed, puppetry was seen as so integral to children's television, values and schedules that Lingstrom's successor, Owen Reed, advocated for the BBC Children's Department to be part of 'the development on a world-market basis of animation and puppet techniques for filmed stories of fantasy and imagination.'¹⁶⁹

Drama: plays, pantomimes and children's schedules

Even before puppetry was valorised as an economical and age-appropriate way to produce drama and represent the fantastic, Children's Television was deploying plays as another dramatic form, reflecting once again the influence of established radio forms as well as the centrality of the play in adult schedules.¹⁷⁰ Another avenue for drama that Adams proposed in 1947 was to

¹⁶⁷ Tat Wood 'Through the Oblong Window: The Regulated Duopoly and the Creation of a Cult Children's Canon in Britain' in *The Cult TV Book* Ed. Stacey Abbott (London: I.B.Tauris, 2010), 167-75

¹⁶⁸ BBC WAC T16/45/2 Quarterly Report, January – March 1959, April 23rd 1959

¹⁶⁹ BBC WAC T16/45/2 'Children's Programmes' Head of C.P. to C.I. Tel June 2nd 1958

¹⁷⁰ See Caughie, *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism, and British Culture*, 34

produce ‘a play on Sunday afternoons at least once every four to six weeks’, although she acknowledges the difficulties in doing so under the contemporary constraints. Adams also states that, based on their previous experience co-producing children’s plays with Glyndebourne and Toynbee Hall Children’s Theatre, ‘we could co-operate with the Young Vic and with various Repertory Companies specialising in children’s plays, e.g. Bradford Civic Theatre, Amersham Rep, etc. Here we would use existing costumes, property and cast, but would be dependent on the Company’s arrangements for suitable dates.’¹⁷¹ Similar television productions of theatrical plays were a key part of pre-war television and still a substantial part of the conceptualisation of television after the war as well, although Jacobs has convincingly discredited the idea that they were the only, or indeed even the main, form of narrative drama on television at this time.¹⁷² Clearly then, children’s television was echoing the ethos and genres of television for adults as well as following the precedents set out by *Children’s Hour (Sound)*, synthesising but also reformulating previous cultural and institutional forms to suggest a new discourse of children’s television. After all, says Adams if with some caution, ‘we could cast and produce our own children’s plays (possibly more satisfactorily [...]).’¹⁷³ Dramas based on pantomimes, fairy tales and fantasy adaptations made up a good section of Christmas programming for children throughout the early output of fantastic drama and even up to the present day. Fairy-tale plays remained a consistent part of the children’s schedules throughout the 1950s as part of an already existing children’s literature as well as being tied into the traditions of children’s pantomime in such productions as *Sleeping Beauty* (26th December 1955), a musical production of *Cinderella* (26th

¹⁷¹ WAC T16/45/1 Mary Adams, June 3rd 1948

¹⁷² See Jacobs *The Intimate Screen*

¹⁷³ BBC WAC T16/45/1 Mary Adams June 3rd 1948

December 1958) and *The Three Princes* (26th December 1959), which was itself re-produced several times over the 1950s and 1960s. In her review of Christmas programming advertised in the *Radio Times* over the 1950s, Amanda Wrigley usefully identifies the annual production of at least several nativity and fairy-tale based plays and pantomimes specifically for Children's Television but points out that 'there do appear to be fewer pantomimes or other festive offerings televised in the new year period as the decade comes to a close and a subtle shift in taste towards a more realistic and socially engaged television drama.'¹⁷⁴ This decrease in festive output, and by corollary the output into which children's fantastic was channelled during Lingstrom and Reed's tenure, was not just a matter of institutional or popular style and taste but an indication of the increasingly precarious position of the Children's Department and its programming. Throughout the 1950s, Owen Reed fought a valiant rear-guard action against the sidelining of BBC Children's; despite this, Children's was eventually remaindered as part of a merger with Women's to form Family Programmes in 1964.

During Christmas of 1950, however, one of these first fantastic and festive children's television productions was an adaptation of *The Reluctant Dragon* by Kenneth Grahame, transmitted at 17.00 on Christmas Eve, 1950. There is very little extant information about this production; the archives at Caversham were unable to locate a production file for it but by collating information from various sources, it is possible to draw a few conclusions. It was produced during Cecil Madden's brief eight month tenure as the Acting Head of Children's between September 1950 and April 1951, and produced by Joy Harington, one of the seven producers newly appointed to the

¹⁷⁴ Amanda Wrigley, 'Christmas past at the BBC: the second half of the 1950s. Part 2' <http://screenplaystv.wordpress.com/2012/12/31/christmas-past-bbc-1950s-2/> (accessed January 6th, 2016)

fledgling Children's department in 1950.¹⁷⁵ It starred Jeremy Spenser as The Boy who befriends the reluctant dragon in Grahame's humorous fable about not judging a book by its cover. Jeremy Spenser appeared the following year as Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as can be seen from this publicity photo in the 1951 BBC Yearbook (Fig. 2) and the subsequent year as Tom Sawyer in *Huckleberry Finn*.

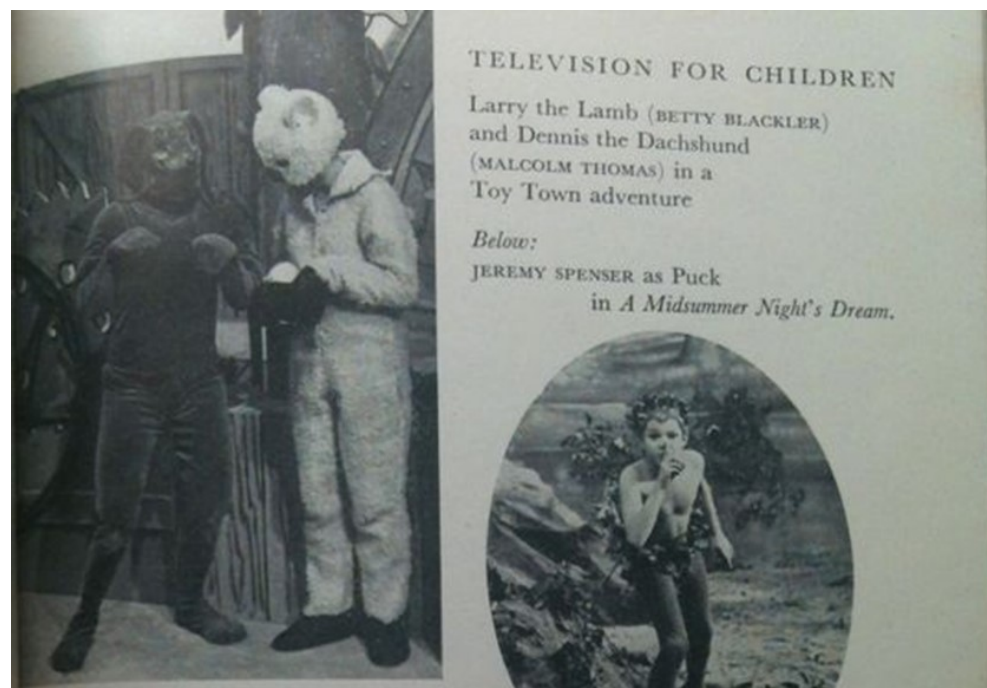


Fig. 2 BBC Yearbook, Jeremy Spenser as Puck

The Reluctant Dragon is therefore most likely a live-action, live transmission production, made in the studio at Lime Grove where children's productions had moved in May 1950. This is supported by the production file for 1951's *Five Children and It*, whose scenery requirements for the Sandpit scene on 17th June 1951 include the 'Reluctant Dragon cave'.¹⁷⁶ In the 1951

¹⁷⁵ See *Home Into the Box of Delights*, 18: These original seven were Peter Thompson (who had already been working on children's television as Caversham docs show), Joy Harington, Dorothea Brooking, Rex Tucker, Michael Westmore, Naomi Capon and Pamela Brown.

¹⁷⁶ BBC WAC T2/49 'Scenery Requirements' Dorothea Brooking to Supply Manager, June 13th 1951

adaptation, ‘the Psammead was played by a small boy who mimed to an actor’s voice’¹⁷⁷ and performed with other child actors, which suggests that *The Reluctant Dragon* cave was therefore most likely full-sized and not scenery for a puppet play. The production of a live-action fantasy play under Madden indicates further his commitment to the genre. However, the production of *The Reluctant Dragon* also gestures towards further institutional values inherent to the construction of BBC Children’s television and its utilisation of classic literature to indicate cultural prestige.

Drama: literary adaptations

‘During the 1950s,’ suggests Buckingham, ‘BBC children’s drama relied heavily on literary adaptations from a range of sources, including novels such as *Jane Eyre* and *The Silver Sword*.’¹⁷⁸ In a Children’s Television policy document, the production of plays, ‘either single or serials based on “classic” or good modern children’s novels’ is described as one of the achievements of the department.¹⁷⁹ Literary adaptations were the safe, cultural, educational choice. Productions developed from ““classic” or good modern children’s novels’ opened up a way of circumscribing a text that could spill out of the boundaries laid down for children’s television and public service broadcasting. (This was made all the more urgent by one of the main contributors to wider discourses of childhood and children’s television; the media itself has historically monitored children’s television with a gimlet eye. One 1949 newspaper article expresses outrage that ‘They Picked a Murder Film for Children’s Hour Television,’ going on to explicitly state ‘Murder by stabbing in the back, massacre of Wild West

¹⁷⁷ Home *Into the Box of Delights*, 27

¹⁷⁸ Buckingham et al, *Children’s Television in Britain*, 107

¹⁷⁹ BBC WAC T16/45/1 ‘BBC Children’s Television: CP Policy’ (post 54) otherwise undated

pioneers... apparently that is the BBC Television Service's idea of a pleasant Sunday afternoon for the children.'¹⁸⁰)

While this tension between what was 'good' and what was 'popular' would persist, as would the anxious scrutiny by the press, plays or serials based on literary sources likewise persisted as texts which might successfully negotiate this tension. Buckingham also suggests that 'drama, especially the classic serial – the adaptation, for instance, of a nineteenth-century novel was central to [the] process' 'of leading children on from one developmental stage to the next'.¹⁸¹ A memo pleading for more resources for Children's Television from Owen Reed, Head of Children's Television from 1956 to 1964, bewailed the fact that 'Studio television is stuck at the point where without more film, and indeed full filming, it must rely on character rather than incident, and this means going back again and again to the leather-bound family favourites.'¹⁸² Studio filming was linked to, and it is suggested perhaps only capable of, sustaining the classic serial as opposed to other genres and in August 1957 Reed compared it unfavourably to ITV's output, describing the BBC as 'lugging behind it the intractable juggernaut of studio television technique'.¹⁸³ Film, and consequently escape from the studio and the forms that studios imposed, was seen as essential to the development of aesthetic and the broadening of genre, and even the development of the BBC as an international children's broadcaster. Reed advocated for production development of 'weekly "export" telefilms with British casts and titles, replacing all but one of our imported Westerns.' He suggested 'one traditional and romantic, the other modern, e.g. Hereward

¹⁸⁰ 'They Picked A Murder Film For Children's Hour Television' in *The Daily Mirror* January 31st 1949, 4

¹⁸¹ Buckingham et al *Children's Television in Britain*, 19

¹⁸² BBC WAC T16/45/2 Policy memo, undated

¹⁸³ WAC T16/45/2 'BBC Children's Television: Note by H.C.P.Tel.' August 23rd 1957

the Wake, Biggles.’¹⁸⁴ The potential export value of such quintessentially British serials on film need not be elaborated upon, but “export” children’s television remained an ITV strength rather than a BBC one (at least until the 1980s). Despite this, even the ‘leather-bound family favourites’ were not inimical to a broad and hybridised form and aesthetic within certain parameters: one *Children’s Newspaper* article reported that the 1951 adaptation of Huckleberry Finn used location filming on the Norfolk Broads to recreate Huck’s travels through Mississippi and the well-known black actor, Orlando Martins, played Jim to Colin Campbell’s Huck.¹⁸⁵

In addition, the use of adaptations would augment BBC Children’s construction of the child audience as one that should be taught as much as entertained, a value that was clearly hewed close to Lingstrom’s own values. In his influential study, *The Disappearance of Childhood*, Postman suggests, ‘Where literacy was valued highly and persistently, there were schools, and where there were schools, the concept of childhood developed rapidly.’¹⁸⁶ This triumvirate of education, literacy and a cultural concept of childhood was, in the 1950s, an already established and politically inflected model. The Education Acts between 1944 and 1947 had put into law the ideal of a universal class of British children whose welfare required a particularised approach with state oversight of their educational, civic, moral and physical development. In a similar fashion, BBC Children’s Programmes construed their child audience as a universal class which needed a particularised approach to production and content and a valorisation of literacy, education and democracy which partially offset

¹⁸⁴ BBC WAC T16/45/2 ‘Children’s Programmes’ Head of C.P. to C.P.Tel, June 2nd 1958

¹⁸⁵ Stephen Bourne, *Black in the British Frame: The Black Experience in British Film and Television* (London & New York: Continuum, 2001), 78

¹⁸⁶ Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1982), 39

cultural fears about television as a mass medium.¹⁸⁷ Within this paradigm, fantasy seems almost incidental to the construction of high cultural, civically inflected dramatisations of literature, suggesting that any representation of the fantastic would be subordinate to the institutional principles of the early BBC.

Drama: 'narrative film' and film in narrative

Other spaces of drama were, however, also being mooted as part of the new children's output, such as the 'narrative film'. BBC documents also use the terms 'fictional films' and 'telefilms'. Film was, in these early years of live transmission and studio production, an invaluable way to create, expand and make possible narrative but wholly filmed productions by domestic broadcasters were rare due to the costs of producing and transmitting such programmes. Often it was cheaper to buy in 'narrative films' from overseas, and often to greater acclaim than could perhaps have been achieved by a home-grown production. Popular filmed genres during the 1950s, particularly with the child audience, were Westerns and action-adventure series like *'Roy Rogers, Hopalong Cassidy, Rin-Tin-Tin, Scarlet Pimpernel, Brave Eagle, Lassie, and, the most popular, Robin Hood.'*¹⁸⁸ It's worth noting that in a contemporary American study of the effect of television on children, nearly all American television regardless of genre is construed as fantasy; Schramm, Lyle and Parker, in 1961, stated that 'the child is introduced to the mass media almost wholly as fantasy' which 'may well help to explain why the idea that television is for fantasy is so deeply ingrained in a child that he often has the greatest difficulty in thinking of educational television, let us say, as a proper use of

¹⁸⁷ Although that was not without its contradistinctions, both institutionally and academically: see Postgate and Ferguson (via Oswell)

¹⁸⁸ BBC WAC T16/45/2 BBC General Advisory Committee GAC 219 'Programmes for Children', September 16th 1957

the medium.¹⁸⁹ A summary of Schramm et al.'s work was produced for the BBC Children's department and subsequently used in a meeting with the Controller of Television; one of the key analyses in the BBC summary seems to point towards the fact that Schramm et al identify that 'Westerns, comedy and crime series, pop and variety are mostly fantasy' which, according to the American authors, invites 'escape, relaxation and passivity.'¹⁹⁰ Since BBC Children's television was predicated upon 'active' viewing, a balance between education and entertainment in all of their output and 'responsible' use of television, this must have seemed like validation of the fact that American and Americanised television could offer children nothing except mindless consumption. It may also have contributed to a general distrust of the fantastic as a genre that perhaps more than any other genre had to be rigorously enclosed by 'participation, commensurability and differentiation' but above all an ideology of middle-class, middle-brow values including implicit education.

The American(ised) series that were so popular on ITV in the 1950s also created further problems. The runaway success of *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, which was produced by Sapphire Films for Lew Grade's ITPC and sold to the US even before it was even transmitted in the UK, focussed popular, academic and industrial attention on the potential effects of these series to the detriment of the home-grown serials that ITV companies were producing, albeit not in great numbers, in their early years.¹⁹¹ The BBC even acknowledges this, stating, 'the children's programmes broadcast by the ITA programme contractors appeared at first to be modelled broadly, as regards aim and content, on those of the BBC. This soon began to

¹⁸⁹ Wilbur Schramm, Jack Lyle and Edwin B. Parker *Television in the Lives of Our Children* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), 26

¹⁹⁰ BBC WAC T16/45/3, 'Summary of *Television in the Lives of our Children*', May 3rd 1961

¹⁹¹ See Hilde T. Himmelweit, *Television and the Child* (London: Published for the Nuffield Foundation by the Oxford University Press, 1958), chapter on Westerns

change and ITV built up the pattern for children's programmes which exists at the moment of writing.' One of the key anchors for the ITV children's schedules was 'a twenty-five minute film. At present, there are eight of these each week. Up to recently, there were nine.'¹⁹² While it is true that home-grown serials for children are not the most voluminous or accomplished part of the ITV children's output, production of children's drama by the ITV programme contractors of the period is consistent, particularly in Associated Rediffusion. Domestic, studio-based drama production for children by ITV companies also increases after 1960 in response to the excoriation of the Pilkington Report and from 1964, with the increased power and public service investment of the ITA and the on-going expansion of the ITV network and the regional companies.

However the popularity and the commercialised approach of bought in narrative films or filmed series produced by ITV companies, and the attention given to this form of entertainment, brought a particular tension to bear after on BBC Children's after ITV companies began transmission in 1955. Having lost an estimated seventy per cent of the child audience to ITV in the late 1950s, BBC Children's re-formatted their approach and output and narrative film began to make an increasing appearance in their output: American filmed series such as *The Lone Ranger*, *The Adventures of Champion* and *Whirlybirds* were bought in and formed a substantial part of the schedules. However this form of 'narrative film' was unlikely to feature the fantastic in any significant way; these productions were often either from America or designed for the American markets and fantasy, as Schramm describes it, is an effect achieved within and by genres such as Westerns, adventure,

¹⁹² BBC WAC T16/45/2 BBC General Advisory Committee GAC 219 'Programmes for Children', September 16th 1957

comedies and crime, produced in America and for American networks and audiences. In the 1950s, the Westerns and action-adventure serials and series that were so popular on British television were inflected by a different industrial practice and cultural *weltanschauung*.

However narrative film is not necessarily a discrete genre. The boundaries and form of the live studio production could be shifted or changed through ‘the use of film inserts, using either stock film or specially filmed material that would be inserted via a telecine machine in between the live studio transmission.’¹⁹³ Specially filmed inserts are used in two of the earliest fantasy dramas produced by the new Children’s Department, *Puck of Pook’s Hill* and *Five Children and It* (both 1951). *Puck of Pook’s Hill* uses film inserts to locate the six-part serial both historically and geographically, as Kipling’s original text uses landscape to evoke the history of England. Location and studio filming is sutured together to create a mythical landscape, and location filming is also used to develop action outside the bounds of the studio: production documents for the telecine shooting show that filming takes place in a meadow but is also used to incorporate a knight on horseback and a swordfight between two main characters. Similarly, *Five Children and It* uses film taken by a domestic airline in conjunction with filmed studio stunt work, using theatrical ‘flying ballet’ rigs, and live transmission to stitch together a fantastic narrative in which the four child protagonists appear to fly. These are ambitious, innovative productions one year into the life of the new department, inventive past what we might expect of serials compromised by lack of both budgetary and technological resources, and film is essential in achieving both effects and affect for both. However, film is also specifically useful to children’s television outside the framework of

¹⁹³ Jacobs, *The Intimate Screen*, 44

production itself. The terms of performance itself were also restricted as both of these productions used child actors, as so many children's television productions did and still do. The Children and Young Persons Act of 1933 limited the age of children for work to those over thirteen and also limited the hours they could work per day to two. As if this wasn't bad enough for television, in 1950 a Home Office Report on the Employment of Children as Film Actors advocated that children should be even more restricted from television in its experimental phase than film or theatre and that television should be subject to the same medical constraints for child performers as with film, particularly with regard to eyesight which it was feared would be damaged by harsh studio lighting. It also lays out that the BBC are not allowed to employ children under twelve years old, which the BBC appear to be cavilling at slightly, and they can only be used for certain periods.¹⁹⁴ An article in *The Children's Newspaper* reports of child actor Judy Raymond in 1957 that her appearance in 'Studio E is her first BBC Television appearance, but Judy was in *Running Jimmy* in Independent TV a year ago, directly she reached her 12th birthday,' reinforcing the proscriptions on child performers for both the BBC and ITV.¹⁹⁵

However, perhaps as significant as these legislative proscriptions was the Committee's recommendation that more film inserts should be used in children's television to break up live transmission for the children's sake.¹⁹⁶ This had formal and economic implications for the production of studio plays which, under these recommendations, have the potential to be

¹⁹⁴Home Office. Report of the Departmental Committee on the Employment of Children as Film Actors, in theatrical work and in ballet, August 1950 [http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:hcpp&rft_dat=xri:hcpp:rec:1950-041317] (accessed January 7th, 2016)

¹⁹⁵ 'Judy is an Expert' in *The Children's Newspaper*, May 25th 1957 [<http://www.lookandlearn.com/childrens-newspaper/CN570525-004.pdf>], 4

¹⁹⁶ Home Office. Report of the Departmental Committee on the Employment of Children as Film Actors, in theatrical work and in ballet, August 1950 [http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:hcpp&rft_dat=xri:hcpp:rec:1950-041317] (accessed January 7th, 2016)

formally more hybrid, more expensive, more ‘glossy’ than the studio productions but also potentially less ‘live’, less child-centric and less cohesive. The report also indicates an external element to the aesthetics of children’s television: the form and stylistics of children’s drama productions are affected by the discourse of children’s television and childhood as a whole. This would, of course, have as much impact on the drama that necessarily already lay within the bounds of the studio: where the period or domestic drama could operate comfortably within the studio in terms of space and budget, it could do so with less ease with regard to children’s employment. This was eased by the Children and Young Person’s Act 1963, and the Performance Regulations of 1968. Film therefore was not only ‘used to free up live studio time and space, and to provide continuity’, but was used to strengthen verisimilitude and aesthetics of ‘quality’ in television drama, inflect the productions generically and circumvent, at least partially, studio restrictions. However film could also be a disadvantage: economically and logistically much more difficult to achieve than live studio filming, imposed as part of external legislation with regard to child actors, or contra to what Jacobs suggests might be a contemporary industrial opposition to ‘inserts [which] introduced impurities into the relationship between performance and audience’, ““a mongrel-element in television drama””.¹⁹⁷

But this concern with dramatic purity and the anxieties of commercial television and its use of filmed programmes sets up a false dichotomy of studio production and filmed series when looked at in relation to early children’s television drama. Film inserts were being used to create genre and a particularised children’s television as early as 1951 in *Puck of Pook’s Hill* and *Five Children and It*, and would later be used in non-fantasy

¹⁹⁷ Jacobs *The Intimate Screen*, 128

children's serials such as *Huckleberry Finn* (1952) and *The Pen of My Aunt* (1960). *Hurricane* (BBC, 1961) even used film shot on location in the West Indies by the BBC Children's Film Unit to create a serial about nurses working abroad. In a 1960 meeting with ITV representatives, Owen Reed declared that 'we have constantly used the need to compete with Robin Hoods in arguing with the Management for a bigger ration of film,' in order to 'meet the glossiness of ITV programmes'.¹⁹⁸

Throughout the 1950s, the BBC and ITV are seen as spatially oppositional: the BBC is confined to the studio and ITV is wholly film when, on the evidence, the BBC has a long tradition of using film inserts to produce drama, especially for children, and the ITV companies were consistently producing live studio drama for children throughout the fifties, albeit on a small scale compared with their 'narrative film' transmission. The spaces of early children's television drama force a reappraisal of what children's television was doing and how it was mediated in the 1950s. It cannot be reduced to a simple binary of BBC 'live' studio filming and ITV filmed series from, influenced by or sold to America. This is a tension that is particularly relevant to the production of fantastic drama within children's television.

While fantasy drama was being produced in the studio, with or without film inserts, despite the constraints of time and space from the inception of the Children's Department, there is no denying that as the child audience became more familiar with television and genre, greater aesthetic hybridity, innovation and investment would be needed to create fantastic genres that would be convincing.

¹⁹⁸ BBC WAC T16/45/3 'BBC Report of a Meeting held on Tuesday 22nd November 1960 at 9.30 a.m. Subject: Children's Television' November 22nd 1960: 'In the Chair: Owen Reed'

Fantasy for the pre-school audience

In May 1951, Freda Lingstrom assumed control of the Children's Programmes (Television) department and the production of spectacular and fantastic dramas declined steeply. This is not to suggest that exciting, innovative serials were not being produced for children but that they were perhaps more easily contained in terms of production demands, budget and space, such as *Stranger in Space*'s ten-minute running time. Derek Johnston suggests, in addition, that serials like *Stranger from Space* were fulfilling a specific function, in attempting to merge elements of popular American filmed drama with home-produced serials and he goes on to establish the text's generic hybridity as both science fiction and spy thriller.¹⁹⁹ His account also places more emphasis upon the textual construction of the fantastic and SFnal rather than its spectacular nature, although it's important to note that Johnston is working from the scripts by Adair and Marriott in the absence of any extant audio-visual material. It might also be worth noting that Lingstrom was, from the early 1950s, working from the expectation of the arrival of Independent Television in Britain and consequent competition for the child audience through 'popular' television, and adaptations of the classics would be more appealing as well as fitting into a broader BBC schema of adaptations and plays. In this respect, the fantastic becomes 'embedded' in productions like *The Silver Swan*, in which a violin is the locus for a time-travel narrative, or *Whistle for Silence* which uses studio technology in a 'live' transmission to create the effect of a whistle which causes silence to fall when squeezed. Drama under Lingstrom re-orientates itself around objects that trigger the intermittently fantastic rather than the fantastic acting as the narrative or being continually on-screen.

¹⁹⁹ Derek Johnston *Genre, Taste and the BBC: The Origins of British Television Science Fiction*, unpublished thesis [https://ueaeprints.uea.ac.uk/10565/1/Thesis_johnston_d_2009.pdf] (accessed January 6th, 2016)

However, the paucity of fantasy programming might have been contextual. In 1953, two years before ITV begins transmitting, Lingstrom sends several impassioned memos to BBC management. She states that with the BBC children's television service 'children are offered from six to seven hours of mixed entertainment every week' and 'in plan, the output is ambitious: all tastes and age groups are catered for and good writers are now contributing a higher standard of plays than in the past'. But she adds, 'in achievement, however, the output is disappointing.' She puts this 'rough and unpolished' programming down to its being 'unrehearsed and cramped by the need for economy.' She ends with a 'plea not only for money but for better conditions. It is true that we need much more money – an O.B. unit – more and better films, overnight settings and countless other things but what we chiefly need is a change of heart towards children's productions.'²⁰⁰ This plea for recognition, resources and parity with other BBC departments explicitly stems from the potential impact of commercial television but may also reflect the Children's Television department's newly independent status as of 1953.²⁰¹ In addition, it was perhaps becoming more visible with its extended schedule and its placement before the Coronation.

While her staff may have regarded her as more draconian than Madden and criticisms were made of her educational slant on children's programmes, Lingstrom's influence on the department and BBC Children's television as a whole was substantial. In fact, Tat Wood argues that the filmed *Watch with Mother* features, Andy Pandy and The Flowerpot Men among others, 'virtually created cult television as we know it' and that 'the ludic nature of the programmes was a marked shift in BBC

²⁰⁰ BBC WAC T16/45/1 'Children and Commercial Television' Head of Children's Programmes, Television to D. Tel. B. through C.P.Tel., December 17th 1953

²⁰¹ Asa Briggs *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume V: Competition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1995), 176

thinking.’ Wood suggests that the framing and the fantastic, cultic nature of Lingstrom and Bird’s filmed programmes is a reversal of approach from Postgate’s strictly ‘emphatically pedagogic’ children’s television.²⁰² To ascribe this much influence to Postgate when clearly Adams, Postgate and latterly Madden had all significantly shaped children’s television before Lingstrom arrived is, I believe, untenable, but output under Lingstrom is markedly different to that under Madden or Postgate. Lingstrom’s employment was based on her educative background and against Madden’s arguable profligacy and populism; consequently, not only does the organisation of the department and programming, through age-stranding and scheduling, improve but genres become differently inflected and more economically produced. Under Lingstrom, fantasy programmes are still produced but are subordinate to a completely different set of values and institutional pressures than they were under Postgate or Madden as acting Heads. Fantasy under Lingstrom is made to serve a different purpose; the ludic, the purely fantastic is ascribed to the pre-school audience and programmes rather than drama and, as Wood suggests, creates an almost cultic narrative around the programmes and the BBC Children’s output of puppetry and animation. Gone are the elaborate, extravagant fantastic programmes for older children which require flying ballet rigs and model work. The fantastic is subsumed into a particularised mode and address for a specific age-stranded audience of pre-school children. Where the fantastic does appear in drama for older children, it is embedded not only within the narrative but also within didactic framework of ‘cultural enlightenment’ and the temporal framework of scheduling. If it is not contained within educational or ‘quality’ drama, then almost invariably

²⁰² Tat Wood ‘Through the Oblong Window: The Regulated Duopoly and the Creation of a Cult Children’s “Canon” in Britain’ in *The Cult TV Book* ed. Stacey Abbott (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 168

the fantastic can only appear in a fairy-tale play or pantomime that appears in the Christmas schedules.

Despite the tensions of audience and production inherent in early children's television production, and the decline in purely fantastic drama narratives, BBC Children's television flourished in the early fifties. The BBC's Director of Television visited the U.S. in 1954, several years into Lingstrom's tenure, and in interview on television stated, 'We are proudest of our children's programmes'.²⁰³ BBC Children's television programmes had become a marker of national quality, exemplifying not only British public service broadcasting but its fundamental differences from American television. BBC Children's television also functioned, even at this early point, as part of a 'quality' market and export. Several years before ITV's *The Adventures of Robin Hood* was sold to the States, one report in the New York Times suggested that the 'British Broadcasting Corporation has produced a set of television programs for small children so widely admired and gratefully received by British parents that they may be given a trial by some TV stations in the United States.' The article from January 1955 went on to frame Andy Pandy as 'one of the stock characters of British children's fantasy' and The Flower Pot Men as inhabiting 'the pleasant fantasy land of the greenhouse when the gardener is away'. It also states that 'Children's television, in the opinion of BBC officials, should be a child's own province, not a comic-strip version of the adult world.'²⁰⁴ Again, it is interesting to note that where Lingstrom had represented Andy Pandy as more attuned to the realistic, as a reflection of the toddler audience, the American press viewed him as a stock character of British children's fantasy. Whatever

²⁰³ Asa Briggs *The History of British Broadcasting*, 897

²⁰⁴ 'BBC's Television for Tiny Tots So Successful U.S. May Imitate It' in *The New York Times*, January 10th 1955, 20 [<http://ezproxy.lib.le.ac.uk/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/113258737?accountid=7420>] (accessed January 7th, 2016)

the differences in perception of fantasy between American and British media, the *New York Times* report emphasises the BBC'S articulation of the discrete nature of public service broadcasting for children and suggests that while fantasy was acceptable, comic-strips were not, indicating the values of taste and commercialism were being set in opposition in this construction of children's television. It was one, however, which was not to last.

In September 1955, ITV franchise holders Associated Rediffusion and ATV started broadcasting in London with franchise holders in the North and Midlands beginning transmission later in 1956. Other franchise holders began transmissions throughout the fifties as the ITA transmitter network started to take shape. The losses to the BBC child audience were far more severe and deleterious than at first expected, sometimes dipping as low as a 70:30 split to ITV, even though Lingstrom had expressed concern about commercial television's impact several years before when discussion of a commercial channel had started. As early as 1953, Lingstrom, in a memo titled 'Children and Commercial Television', stated 'There is every indication that in a comparatively short time we are likely to be faced with a wealthy and adventurous competitor who may well be less scrupulous than we are as to the length of time children should be tempted to look at the screen.'²⁰⁵

As with McGivern's earlier statement on the necessity of children's television so that they don't watch adult television, Lingstrom's opposition of commercial television is framed as an anxiety about boundaries and the uses to which television should be put. Part of the destabilisation that BBC Children's repeatedly attributes to commercial television is the breakdown of the differentiation of children's television and the lack of

²⁰⁵ WAC BBC T16/45/1 'Children and commercial television' H.C.P.Tel. to D.Tel. B. December 17th 1953

specialisation in its children's productions; commercial priorities, they argue, will always override any true value. In addition, commercial television is made cognate with American television and its associated values. This was a criticism that had been formed a large part of the rhetoric against the creation of commercial television throughout the pre-legislation years. Lingstrom advocates that to combat the yet to be established Independent Television and its potential pernicious influence, it fell to the BBC Children's Department to 'so develop children's television that by sheer weight of goodness it is we who will become the formidable rival, not they.'²⁰⁶ However, as Chapter Two will show, 'sheer weight of goodness' was not enough to defeat the early popular appeal of the new commercial services.

Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, drama and televisual modes of the fantastic developed early in the BBC's television for children, often overlapping as the Children's Programmes department sought to establish their audience, their output and their values as children's television producers. The use of the fantastic fluctuated not only according to the department's administration but concomitantly with shifting conceptions of the child audience. Hence, when Madden was Head of Children's and committed to a particular production culture, oriented towards producing hybridised drama incorporating style and 'showmanship', fantasy was an unchallenged and spectacular element of drama productions. Under Lingstrom, however, a more developmental schedule emerged in which drama could be used for didacticism as much as for entertainment, and therefore did not have room for Madden's brand of showmanship.

²⁰⁶ WAC BBC T16/45/1 'Children and commercial television' H.C.P.Tel. to D.Tel. B. December 17th 1953

Chapter Three: Competition, Family and Fantasy, 1955-1969

Introduction

From 1955, the BBC's monopoly on broadcasting was broken when Independent Television began broadcasting. Previously, BBC Children's department had been free to theorise and deliver children's television as they thought fit. When Independent Television was first proposed, concerns were raised not only about the effect it would have upon the cultural life of the nation but more particularly the moral and psychological effect it would have upon children. These anxieties were expressed publicly and institutionally; Lingstrom in 1953 stated the BBC were 'to be faced with a wealthy and adventurous competitor who may well be less scrupulous than we are as to the length of time children should be tempted to look at the screen.'²⁰⁷ In conjunction with popular anxieties about creeping Americanisation and the empty calories of 'people's television', this perception of the BBC as cultural bastion and ITV as a purely and damagingly commercial service persisted into the 1960s. However, as this chapter will demonstrate, both readings are imprecise: the BBC had from the early 1950s been showing American narrative films in the children's schedules, and ITV companies consistently produced home-originated children's drama from its inception.

Throughout this period, the two institutions of what would come to be known as the 'regulated duopoly' developed their understanding of the child audience. Yet, this chapter will suggest that during this time they develop this understanding along different axes and into different production cultures, impelled by wider institutional concerns. This resulted in the loss of the BBC Children's drama capabilities and then its

²⁰⁷ WAC BBC T16/45/1 'Children and commercial television' H.C.P.Tel. to D.Tel. B. December 17th 1953

departmental status with its re-constitution into Family Programmes; on the other hand, throughout the 1960s the ITA was moving the ITV companies towards a more vigorous and child-centred drama production strategy. Thus, fantasy drama was developing out of two significantly different production cultures, which operated contrary to popular expectation. Case studies index this production dichotomy by looking at one of the few BBC fantasy dramas produced for children during this time, the 1968 BBC Schools' production of *Tom's Midnight Garden*, and Granada's 1969 production, *The Owl Service*.

BBC Children's: 1956-1964

When Freda Lingstrom retired in 1956, she was succeeded by Owen Reed, who like Lingstrom had a background in Schools Broadcasting and shared many of her principles regarding children's television and its audiences. This was unsurprising, since Lingstrom had according to Reed handpicked him as the new head of Children's. However, according to Buckingham, Reed faced a nigh on impossible task:

Requiring attention to "standards" and popularity alike, Reed's job description amounted to the reinvention of public service children's television. Ratings success without merely imitating ITV's output involved comprehensive change – in scheduling, in technology and aesthetics, in the range of the BBC's programmes for children, and in the ways in which it defined and addressed its audience. It meant disturbing settled values and working practices, and engaging with wider patterns of contemporary cultural change.²⁰⁸

ITV had started broadcasting from September 1955 and one of the immediate casualties for the BBC seemed to be the national

²⁰⁸ Buckingham *Children's Television in Britain*, 14

children's audience. The introduction of competition threw into sharp relief the tensions of what children themselves wanted from television and what public service broadcasting thought they should watch as well as the 'patterns of contemporary cultural change' that would have long-lasting effects on modern Britain. Address was also called into question with the success of ITV programming such as *The Adventures of Robin Hood* which was aimed at families, rather than children. The BBC Children's department had always built their identity and productions around the idea of children as a specialised audience; how far could this be sustained if children themselves were not watching BBC but ITV's more family-oriented programming? This problem was exacerbated by the fact that, in 1957, the Post-Master General, Charles Hill, acceded to the demands of the ITV companies that the 'toddlers' truce', the hour between 6 and 7pm when television went off-air, should be removed. This increased the broadcasting hours for both companies as well as ITV's advertisement potential but it also meant that the dividing space between children's television and adult television had been erased. Differentiation of age-appropriate television would now have to be textual as much as spatial whilst still having to address the complications of quality and popularity, which was itself no easy task, especially in the light of the title 'Children's Television' being taken off-air in 1959, and finally receiving the coup de grace in 1961. In 1958, Reed had stated glumly that 'the claims of prestige drive us one way and popularity another',²⁰⁹ and argued for a children's schedule that in most respects emulated that of the ITV companies.

In negotiating the divided duty of prestige and popularity, "[t]he main battleground as far as the long-term future of the Children's Department was concerned was the area of

²⁰⁹ BBC WAC T16/45/1 'Children's programmes' H.C.P.Tel. to C.P.Tel., June 2nd 1958

drama'.²¹⁰ Reed increased and significantly broadened drama production; adaptations, adventure serials and holiday programming such as fairy tales and pantomimes were still being produced live and in-studio, but drama productions were becoming more aesthetically hybridised and rooted in contemporary culture and audience preference. Drama productions were made about World War II and its aftermath, such as *The Watch Tower*, *The Long Way Home* and *The Last Man Out*, adaptations were oriented more towards action in such programmes as *Triton* and *The Silver Sword*, and original dramas became increasingly prevalent, if still concerned with aspirations of quality through literary and historical framing, as in *The Queen's Champion*. Reed recognised that BBC Children's would have to, in part at least, compete on ITV's terms. To this end, he suggested that 'narrative films' should be used as an anchor for the children's schedules and called for more 'home-made adventure film'.²¹¹ By 1958, he was proposing a schedule that resembled in many particulars the ITV children's service. Despite this, up until January 1962 the Children's Television department was, throughout this embattled period, producing children's serials that attempted to address the tensions of cultural taste and popular appeal that had become ever more pointed in the wake of ITV's launch.

Production of drama in studios and overall was however being constrained not just by historical-technological and institutional-spatial paucity but by the increasingly negative reaction of the BBC to children's television as part of a public service broadcasting model. Internal BBC documents reveal an on-going and often acerbic correspondence between Reed, Joanna Spicer, and Stuart Hood in 1960-61 in which Reed protests the loss of Children's budget resources (£1000 of

²¹⁰ Home *Into the Box of Delights*, 35

²¹¹ BBC WAC T16/45/1 'Children's programmes' H.C.P.Tel. to C.P.Tel., June 2nd 1958

£1500 allotment transferred to the Script Unit),²¹² the loss of children's schedule coherence to the over-run of televised sporting events, and the title of 'Children's Television' as well as of his authority.²¹³ In January 1963, production capabilities for drama and light entertainment were withdrawn from the Children's Department and relegated to the adult-oriented departments. Reed stated of the decision to remove the department's drama capabilities that 'it was a perfectly valid decision for any Controller of Programmes to make. I just happen to think it was a crucially wrong one. I think it was made in fact for a political purpose. It was made to rob the Children's Department and its Head of any further power or influence or to assert their right to a substantial existence. Because without our drama side, we really were without weapons to fight with in a competitive situation.'²¹⁴ Monica Sims, a later head of Children's, described this event in more partisan terms, declaring that children's drama 'was killed in 1963'.²¹⁵ But even before that, certain genres of drama, such as the purely fantastic, were being proscribed. In 1956, a review of a proposal of *The Silver Curlew* by the Assistant Head of C.P. Tel., Ursula Eason, states that among the reasons it was rejected was that it was 'fantasy, a form of story which seems to appeal to few children in the largest viewing age-group'.²¹⁶ Two years later, a letter from a child viewer proposes an improved weekly schedule and programmes for BBC Children's television, which includes a 'fantasy serial', perhaps *Alice in Wonderland*. The letter is attached to a policy document, indicating how seriously viewer complaints about children's television were taken,

²¹² BBC WAC T16/45/3 'Film Write-offs' Head of C.P.Tel. to H.P.P. Tel. February 29th 1960

²¹³ BBC WAC T16/45/3 'Children's Identity' Controller of Programmes, Tel to H.C.P.Tel. November 7th 1961
Tellingly, an annotation by Owen Reed states, 'This is the statement I said was coming.'

²¹⁴ BBC WAC R73/525/1 'Oral History Project: Reed, Owen interviewed by Lane, John' December 14th 1977, 52

²¹⁵ BBC WAC B213-002, 'An Appraisal of BBC Children's Programmes since 1967 – not for publication' Monica Sims April 25th 1972

²¹⁶ BBC WAC T16/45/2 'Children's Television' Assistant Head of Children's Programmes, Tel. to D.D.Tel.B August 20th 1956

particularly since as Owen Reed suggests her ‘likes and dislikes, I suspect, are near to those of the majority’, although he adds regretfully, ‘I do not think she is a particularly likeable child but there is food for thought both in what she has to say and the mood in which she says it.’²¹⁷ This emphasised the contemporary institutional concern about the need for audience shares and the reflexive response through genre to the child audience that the BBC were losing to ITV, but perhaps it also indicates the gaps in the schedule which were not being filled by BBC Children’s under Reed.

The BBC Children’s department was praised in the Nuffield report, *Television and the Child*, of 1958, the O’Conor Report (1960) and the Pilkington Committee Report of 1962 (unlike the ITV companies) but none of this could avail it in the face of the changes sweeping the BBC in the 1960s and the alleged implacable opposition to a discrete children’s television and department from the new Controller and Assistant Controller of Television, Stuart Hood and Donald Baverstock. In 1964, Children’s was merged with the Women’s Programmes department despite protests from Reed and (reportedly) Doreen Stephens, then Head of Women’s. Thus began a period in which there was no dedicated children’s department but which also signalled a loss of dedicated children’s drama almost altogether.

Family Programmes, 1964-67

In February 1964, Kenneth Adam, the BBC Director of Television, announced the establishment of the Family Programmes department out of the ashes of Children’s Programmes and Women’s Programmes. The purpose and remit of Children’s Programmes were re-evaluated not just on their

²¹⁷ BBC WAC T16/45/2 BBC General Advisory Committee GAC 219 ‘Programmes for Children’, September 16th 1957

own terms but as part of a wider move in the BBC of the 1960s, which is often attributed to BBC Director-General Hugh Carleton Greene's desire for 'the BBC to mirror a changing society and culture' throughout the 1960s.²¹⁸ Briggs' history of the BBC goes on to declare 'There was nothing distinctive in such an approach during the 1960s, when all kinds of institutions, even the most ancient, were under pressure from within as well as from without, but it was a new approach for a Director-General of the BBC.'²¹⁹

However, this new department's genesis and remit was contentious even before it had started operating. Producers active within the Children's Department at the time described it as 'a thoroughly bad and cynical idea and was perceived by most of us as "dumping all the rubbish together".'²²⁰

The head of this new family-oriented programming department was Doreen Stephens, previously Head of BBC Women's. Despite her reported reluctance, Stephens assumed the role from February 1965 and during her time in post, she promoted and defended the new Family Programmes and its remit, at least in public: Briggs rather dryly suggests that '[w]hat she said was in line with statements of persons superior to herself in the new BBC hierarchy.'²²¹ Stephens described Family Programmes to Mary Crozier of *The Guardian* as 'less a new province than a rationalisation of what was actually happening'. Crozier, however, was less than convinced, stating 'some of the things which I think most important for children, which are scarce already, will not become more plentiful. What the BBC calls "narrative" is a casualty.'²²² Later that month, *The Guardian's* page for women, 'Women Talking', ran an article which

²¹⁸ Briggs, *The BBC: the First Fifty Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 330

²¹⁹ Ibid, 331

²²⁰ Biddy Baxter, Edward Barnes and Rosemary Gill *Blue Peter: the Inside Story* (London: Interpet Ringpull BBC, 1989), 58

²²¹ Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Vol 5: Competition*, 347

²²² Mary Crozier, 'TV for the Family' in *The Guardian* March 12th 1964, 8

addressed the concerns of mothers for this change to children's programming. Judith Cook lamented:

The fact that "narrative" programmes are going to vanish almost completely strikes me as staggering. My own children enjoy plays and serials most of all and they cannot be exceptional. They usually go on to read the book on which the play is based, and from there they reach out to discover book by the same author. Has it occurred to those responsible for children's programmes in both channels that these children who watch poor programmes will one day grow up and will have learnt to expect nothing better? Where will be the audience for plays, or is "narrative" going to vanish from the adult scene as well?²²³

The new department had a remit that covered both adult and children's output and that was anchored around the idea of the space and relationships of the domestic sphere; however, the children's output was almost exclusively based in the genres of factual, pre-school and light entertainment, and even those were tenuous. Light entertainment for children had been the province of the Light Entertainment department since January 1963 and remained so, as did drama for both adults and children, which was produced by the three Drama Group departments, Serials, Series and Plays. Effectively, Family Programmes was left with an amorphous idea of what its output might consist of, an uncertainty that persisted at a Service-wide level for a large part of their existence. Nine months after the department was established, Rich sent a memo to the C.I.Tel, stating that feedback from staff 'suggest that there is uncertainty among some lecturers as to our present output and terms of reference.' Perhaps somewhat bitterly, Rich goes on, 'This is

²²³ Judith Cook, 'Women Talking' in *The Guardian* Mar 30th 1964, 4

understandable in view of the brevity of the original promulgation about the formation of Family Programmes.²²⁴

Part of this operational uncertainty may have been due to the peripheral nature of the productions they made and the corresponding regard in which they seem to be held within the Corporation. Not only had Children's Television been stripped of their drama and light entertainment capabilities, only a few months into Family Programmes Stephens was appealing to BBC management for more staff and more resources for both adult and children's output. In increasingly fraught correspondence, she called attention to the lack of any weekday serials for children and the paucity of any other narrative material. Two months after she assumed her position as head, Stephens identifies that 'on the children's side, for balanced output the story/adventure/fantasy element is essential. Specially made serials for children have been discontinued. Repeats from previous output are now [drying] up. New experimental programme ideas for filling this need cannot be pursued until the staff position is reinforced. The only other source, bought films, are becoming scarce [sic] but I am investigating a possible source of supplies from the Walt Disney set-up. I will also investigate possibilities of new co-production films with Television Enterprises, in spite of the disasters with "Swallows and Amazons".²²⁵ In subsequent memoranda, she draws attention to the under-staffing of her department, describing the ratio of staff to expected programming output as 'quite inadequate'.²²⁶

From this correspondence, it appears that Family Programmes was, within a few months of its establishment, already in a

²²⁴ BBC WAC T31/324 'Family Programmes' Family Programmes Organiser to C.I.Tel. October 20th 1964

²²⁵ BBC WAC T31/324 'Report on Family Programmes Dept.' Head of Family Programmes, Tel. to C.P.Tel. March 17th 1964

²²⁶ BBC WAC T31/324 'Family Programmes Staffing' Head of Family Programmes, Tel. to Establishment Officer, Programmes, Tel. June 5th 1964

parlous state due to under-staffing and divided programming responsibilities. Both adult output and children's output were, under the pressure of institutional and departmental change, being ground slowly and 'exceeding small' down to barebones operation and philosophy. Children's output had become less 'a service in miniature' and more tent-pole programming, driven and supported by the major programmes, such as *Blue Peter*, *Playschool*, *Jackanory*, and *Treasure House*, from the West region. These were prestigious programmes, winning accolades from BAFTA, the Prix Jeunesse Foundation, and the Royal Television Society, but they were designed as long-running institutions, sociologically-based and educationally-inflected. Little to no weekday drama for the children's output appeared to be forthcoming from the Drama Group and slots for narrative, in the name of a balanced output, had to be filled with expensive purchased telefilms.

However, publicly, it was being framed differently. In two of Stephens' representations of the Family Programmes department and output during its lifetime, she stated that children's weekday drama had been lost for several reasons: cost, quality and address. In the July 1965 issue of *EBU Review*, the journal for the European Broadcasting Union, she suggested that the loss of children's drama was almost inevitable as television itself developed:

As television developed and techniques were perfected, so these changes were reflected in the children's programmes. Costs rose inevitably. A refusal to accept a second-rate standard was one of the reasons which led to the decision to break down the original Children's Programmes Department. [...] It was becoming apparent that the drama output of the Children's

Department in mid-week would either have to drop in standard or have increased budgets.²²⁷

The subsequent loss of children's drama during the week and to the adult Drama departments becomes, framed in this way, a noble attempt by the BBC to maintain the quality of their drama productions and avoid not so much ghetto television as 'slum television'.

A year later, Stephens told the audience for her BBC lunchtime lecture, *Television for Children*, 'Until 1962 the BBC produced one or two mid-week drama series especially for children.²²⁸ At that time rising costs, and the fear of developing a double standard with children as second-class citizens, brought a decision to stop further production.'²²⁹ It is noteworthy that both of these statements were made subsequent to Stephen's notification in May 1965 that 'the main issue of the Department is and will be programmes for Children,' and that the adult output of Family Programmes would be made obsolete.²³⁰ This may account for the fact that, of the six pages of the EBU article, only one addresses adult output, although without any mention of its retirement. The following year, Stephens' lecture made no mention of Family Programmes' lost adult remit. A year later, Stephens departed the BBC for the new ITV company, London Weekend Television, as, ironically enough, Head of Children's Programmes. The loss of Women's Programmes and then adult Family Programmes had clearly been a bitter pill to swallow.

Alistair McGown calls the amalgamation of Children's Programmes and Women's Programmes in 1963 a 'politically

²²⁷ Doreen Stephens 'Family programmes of BBC Television' in *EBU Review* 92 July 1965, 19

²²⁸ Actually Sims suggests the Department was putting out three serials per week in 1962: BBC WAC B213-002, 'An Appraisal of BBC Children's Programmes since 1967 – not for publication' Monica Sims April 25th 1972

²²⁹ Doreen Stephens *Television for children: A lecture by Doreen Stephens* (London: BBC. Lunchtime lectures, fifth series; 1966), 16

²³⁰ BBC WAC T31/324 'Family Programmes Department' Controller of Programmes, Tel. to A.C.Tel. A. May 4th 1965

motivated closure'²³¹; however, while the move got rid of two departments that were problematic both in policy and personnel to the BBC management, particularly at a time of institutional change, it also allowed for the development of a radical culture-driven re-orienting and decentralisation of children's programming. Children's drama and light entertainment programmes were still being produced but not by a recognised dedicated department. This reallocation of drama for children to adult drama departments meant that children's serials largely returned to the studio-bound model and literary 'classic' sources so prevalent in the 1950s, such as productions of *The Further Adventures of the Three Musketeers*. There is some evidence of contemporary serials being made by the Drama Group for children's: *Adventure Weekly*, *A Handful of Thieves* (which was broadcast in the Monday after-school schedule). These went out in weekday slots, as do previous Sunday serials such as 1968's *The Railway Children*, but the transmission of weekday drama for children remained a gallimaufry of origination, with little home-grown drama and none produced by the Family Programmes department. Educational drama may, however, have been repurposed to bolster the schedules: McGown suggests that 'The Battle of St George Without', transmitted on Mondays 15/12/69-29/12/69, and 'A Stranger on the Hills', transmitted on Mondays 02/02/70-16/02/70, may have originally been part of the BBC Schools *Merry-Go-Round* miscellany programme, repeated for afternoon schedules. Another *Merry-Go-Round* serial, 'Tom's Midnight Garden' (looked at in closer detail in the case study) was proposed for a repeat in the afternoon schedules, earlier in the same year.

Drama for children was therefore not wholly dead during this period but it existed as alternative televisual discourses not recognised as children's drama or even 'children's television',

²³¹ McGown *The Hill and Beyond*, 2

such as those of drama produced by adult departments, most commonly formulated as the classic serial, and also perhaps unexpectedly educational broadcasting. When Family Programmes had first been mooted, Dorothea Brooking, then a producer for Children's Programmes, had requested a transfer to BBC Drama, but had ended up in BBC Schools along with colleague Joy Harington.²³² However, in 1968, Brooking made 'Tom's Midnight Garden' as a serial for *Merry-Go-Round*. 'Tom's Midnight Garden' was produced and screened as educational programming, but formally and aesthetically it was purely fantastic drama: a coherent and contiguous dramatic presentation, incorporating expensive, expansive location filming and studio filming at Ealing, special effects for the fantastic aspects and a generic approach of costume drama. School children responded enthusiastically to its screening in classrooms (see letters) but it was also considered for repurposing in the absence of specialised children's drama as children's television, further destabilising the boundaries between children's television and educational television. In fact, 'Tom's Midnight Garden' was shown at the Conference on 'Television Drama for Young People' with no reference made, as far as can be seen, to its educational origins.²³³ In a letter to the author, Philippa Pearce, producer Dorothea Brooking informs her that she has 'now heard from Monica Sims, Head of [the newly re-established] Children's Programmes, that she is anxious to show the programme again for Children's (as distinct from Schools') Television at 5.00pm on a weekday, and I think this will be happening in the near future.'²³⁴ This letter was written only two months after the first transmission of *Merry-Go-Round* as part of the BBC Schools' schedule (Mondays, 11/11/68-02/12/68).

²³² BBC WAC T31/324 'Report on Family Programmes Dept' Head of Family Programmes, Tel. to C.P.Tel. March 17th 1964

²³³ 'ITA should set up children's department' in *The Stage* Dec 4th 1969, 11

²³⁴ BBC WAC T57/141/1 Letter from Dorothea Brooking to Philippa Pearce, January 16th 1969

Sims' desire for 'Tom's Midnight' Garden to be re-shown as part of the weekday schedules of the newly reconstituted Children's Department suggests a repurposing of all available drama forms, regardless of provenance. This echoes the procurement of suitable European films to fill the need for narrative drama, a need still on-going several years after the reconstitution of the department: in 1969, 'Sims was still [...] commenting regretfully on the way in which she had to "make a virtue out of necessity" in "combing Europe" for drama programmes which could be bought and dubbed by the BBC.'²³⁵ However, Sims and her department were deliberately searching closer to home for domestic drama and developing dramatic form out of the programmes which had kept narrative alive in children's programmes as early as 1968, suggesting a genealogy for children's drama located within the Family programmes period and into what would be described as a Golden Age for BBC children's programming.²³⁶ In fact, Dorothea Brooking would also be asked by Sims to return to the new Children's Department, an offer she accepted with alacrity, going on to make some of classic children's adaptations for which the BBC would become renowned. 'Tom's Midnight Garden' therefore set a precedent for the use of fantasy drama as both a classic adaptation and a fantasy drama incorporating aspects of public service value, citizenship and childhood as a place of magic. Sims' desire to rescreen it within children's schedules also highlights the changing nature of the department from 1968 and the concomitant shift in the institutional perception of the needs of the child audience.

²³⁵ Buckingham *Children's Television in Britain*, 32

²³⁶ Home *Into the Box of Delights*, 38

Tom's Midnight Garden (BBC Schools, 1968)

Tom's Midnight Garden, written by Philippa Pearce and first published in 1958, has from its early years been regarded as 'classic' children's literature and one of the foremost texts of children's fantasy. Adapted three times by the BBC, the earliest of these was ten years after its publication, produced for the BBC Schools miscellany programme, *Merry Go Round*, in 1968. While there's little existing material on *Merry-Go-Round*, the production file for 'Tom's Midnight Garden' shows that they also have in production other drama adaptations, some from around the world. However, contrary to the typical format of a Schools programme as a teaching aid, didactic, fragmented, interpolated with explicitly educational material, the 1968 adaptation of 'Tom's Midnight Garden' was wholly dramatic and unexpectedly lavish. Its style and spaces were perhaps a necessity given its nature and location as a book: John Rowe Townsend describes the text as 'one of the small handful of masterpieces of English children's literature [...] The garden is so real that you have the scent of it in your nostrils.'²³⁷ This reality of imaginary space as well as the classic nature of the novel may be linked to the unusual expansiveness of the 1968 adaptation. Shot in large part on location, the production crew and cast filmed at a stately home and on location around the area, including on a river. Production also took place in several different studios, Ealing for material on film, and Television Centre, Studio 2, for the material on videotape.

The key space of the drama was naturally the garden. However the garden was presented in the novel was not simply a traditional garden attached to the block of flats in which Tom's aunt and uncle lived or the small 'town garden' of Tom's own house, but a garden in which the fantastic was inherent, not just in its appearance but its space.

²³⁷ John Rowe Townsend *Written for Children* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 229

Pearce's text makes this promise of space explicit and child-oriented:

That they should have deceived him - lied to him – like this! They had said, "It's not worth your while going out at the back, Tom." So carelessly they had described it: "A sort of back-yard, very poky, with rubbish bins. Really, there's nothing to see."

Nothing... Only this: a great lawn where flower-beds bloomed; a towering fir-tree, and thick, beetle-browed yews that humped their shapes down two sides of the lawn; on the third side, to the right, a greenhouse almost the size of a real house; from each corner of the lawn, a path that twisted away to some other depths of garden, with other trees.²³⁸

However, when adapted for visual media, the spatial dimensions and mystery of Pearce's fantasy garden paradoxically emphasised the need for location-based 'realism'. Such a garden could not realistically be re-created in a studio under 1960s television conditions, and the production file shows that, past a Photo Blow Up of the garden as a stand-in backdrop, the producers did not try. The garden therefore seems to have been largely visualised through film on location, and the extent to which film was employed in the production was unusual. The total invoice for filming shows approx. £1092 for filming on location and £54 for VT. Filming took place at Isfield Place in East Sussex between 6th and 19th August 1968.²³⁹ The filming at Isfield Hall is referred to in general terms, but it seems likely that the gardens were the focus especially since according to *Country Life* the gardens were developed in the early 1900s into an Arts and Crafts-style

²³⁸ Philippa Pearce *Tom's Midnight Garden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958 2nd edtn. 1998), 19-20

²³⁹ BBC WAC T57/141/1 Letter from Chief Assistant, Finance, Television Administration to Commander W. Segrave, D.S.C. Isfield Place, July 19th 1968

‘gardens of rooms’ pattern. It would therefore offer a varied and historically reflective, as well as a closed, landscape in which to film and a vivid contrast to the increasingly urban landscape. In effect, these gardens could function as closed-off spaces on private grounds for filming, a studio set on location. While the house itself is impressive, the BBC studio requests show that much of the interior filming was located around the bedroom and the hall, the only interior spaces of import in the novel. A memo from Judith Miles, assistant to Dorothea Brooking, requested designer Gordon Roland to organise studio sets for Ealing and Television Centre. She states that:

Studio sets will be needed at Ealing; Corner of modern bedroom (i.e. bed, bedside table, clock), corner of hall + grandfather clock, backdoor and PBU garden behind.

T.C.2 sets will be needed; 2 identical Hall and staircase sets + 2 identical grandfather clocks (1900 and 1968 halls, clocks remain the same), corner of garden, a bedroom (1900) + piece of passage outside, PBU garden, PBU backyard + dustbins, bedroom (same as 1900 but 1968-style) + 1968 passage outside.²⁴⁰

The doubled interiors are made to echo the time-travel narrative, showing the same spaces but in different time periods, a production technique that would be used to anchor multiple other time travel children’s programmes like *A Traveller in Time* (BBC, 1978), *The Georgian House* (HTV West, 1976), and other adaptations of *Tom’s Midnight Garden* (BBC, 1974 and 1989). The changing historical spaces of the domestic, and consequently the historical spaces of family and social power, are a key feature of children’s television fantasy. The heuristics of negotiating these overlapping spaces and times embeds educational knowledge as well as discourses of contemporary

²⁴⁰ BBC WAC T57/141/1 ‘Merry-Go-Round “Tom’s Midnight Garden” and Dutch Film, Design Effort’ Asst. to Dorothea Brooking to Gordon Roland, T.C. July 9th 1968

citizenship in all of these texts. Rather more concretely, however, the viewers are called upon to recognise the spaces in which these times are imbricated and the fantasy created through differences in *mise en scene*, and as suggested in the introduction the spaces between the shots. The fantasy is not merely the garden but the multiple time periods and characters who inhabit the same space. The timeshift can be seen effected through Colour Separation Overlay in the 1974 version. History is literally brought home in many of the time-slip narratives in children's television, and this is reliant in most cases upon the use of the studio and videotape.

Further location filming however also took place five miles away from Isfield Place at the Anchor Inn at Barscombe: the production used the boats and the riverbank belonging to the public house to film Hattie and Tom's row down the Thames (in this case, the Ouse).²⁴¹ The row down the river stands in for the skate down the frozen Thames as depicted in the book, which would have been unachievable under the budget and production conditions of the 1968 and 1974 productions. (By the time of the 1989 production, technology and budgets had advanced to the point where it was achievable.) However, the location filming in 1968 was still unexpectedly expansive, following Hattie and Tom onto and down the river in a boat. In 1968, 'Tom's Midnight Garden' was an innovative and expensive piece of film-making, especially for educational broadcasting.

This innovation and expense was borne out by the creation of the fantastic through special effects. In a letter responding to the schoolchildren who had watched the programme as part of its intended classroom audience, Judith Miles described how the production team achieved the door effect:

²⁴¹ BBC WAC T57/141/1 'Merry-Go-Round: "Tom's Midnight Garden" Filming, Sussex. Facilities Fee.' Asst. to Dorothea Brooking to Mr Roger Williams, S.A.Tel. Fin's Office, T.C. August 28th 1968

[...] the door that Tom walked through was not made of plastic. Perhaps you know that, if you take a picture with a camera, and forget to wind the film on, and then take another picture, you get two pictures on top of each other. Well, we took a picture of Tom's door. Then we opened the door, and put a lot of black curtains round it so that nothing else showed except the door-way. And then we took another picture of Tom pushing his way through those black curtains. When we developed the film we put the two pictures on top of each other, and so it looked as if Tom went right through a closed door. (Of course it is easier to do clever things like that with a movie camera than with a camera that only takes stills.)

You may be interested to know that we tried to get Tom going through a foam-rubber door to get the magic effect we wanted. We made a door out of rubber, and painted it like the door in the garden, and made a slit in it. Then we took the garden door off the hinges and put our rubber door up instead. We filmed Tom squeezing through the slit, but in the end it didn't look as good or as magic as the other way!²⁴²

I have reproduced a large part of this letter to demonstrate the methods used within late 1960s programming but more importantly the rapid shift to new technologies and its rapid uptake and experimentation, supporting Johnson's theorisation of telefantasy as a genre which consistently pushed the boundaries of television, both aesthetically and narratively.

It is clear from this production history that fantasy drama was still present in children's television in the 1960s. This adaptation may have been produced for BBC Schools but the subsequent request by Sims to re-use in the afternoon schedules

²⁴² BBC WAC T57/45/1 Letter from Asst. to Dorothea Brooking to The Children, Park Walk Infants' School, Chelsea January 2nd 1969

makes clear the desire within a newly reconstituted Children's department to repopulate the drama strand, and evidences the commitment of industry professionals to its production. Its lavish production on location in heritage spaces and its use of special effects clearly delighted its audience of schoolchildren, and would have formed a spectacular contrast to any studio-bound drama the nascent department would have been able to stage themselves. It also reinforces the continuities and correspondences within the BBC and children's television: Brooking would continue making 'lovely weepies' for the BBC and ITV for years afterwards, including the 1978 *A Traveller in Time* (see chapter three).²⁴³ This production was one of the few fantasy dramas produced for children during the 1960s, but it is both an example of Brooking keeping the faith and is the direct progenitor of a restored drama schedule. Six years later, this three-part production would be re-produced by the same production team, writer John Tully and Producer and director, Dorothea Brooking, for the restored children's weekday schedules, and hailed as a classic.

Children's ITV, 1955-1969

Independent television started broadcasting in 1955 but had been under discussion for several years previously, most notably endorsed in the 1952 White Paper, and Selwyn Lloyd's Significant Minority Report appended to the 1949 Beveridge Report. The primacy of the BBC in what was seen as an early monopoly on television was, in fact, a driving force behind the establishment of Independent Television, despite opposition from high-profile public figures, such as the BBC's John Reith and Lord Hailsham. The public and political outcry was immediate and centred on the cultural and moral decline that

²⁴³ BBC WAC T57/141/1 'Tom's Midnight Garden' Kenneth Fawdry to Dorothea Brooking, December 2nd 1968

could result from commercial television. Much of the objection pointed towards American television as a terrible warning, and an immediate dichotomy was established between the BBC and any commercial competition: a 'juxtaposition [...] between public service earnestness on the one hand and private pleasure on the other'.²⁴⁴ Ultimately, despite widespread opposition, Independent Television was made law in the 1954 Television Act, which also established its regulatory body, the Independent Television Authority. Following the institution of independent television from 1955, initially through the first three ITV franchises, Associated Rediffusion, ATV and ABC and culminating in the establishment of the fifteenth franchise in 1962, it existed with the BBC as part of what was known as the regulated duopoly. This framework of competition and balance lasted for twenty years until Channel Four began transmission in 1982, although the ITV companies were integral to the new channel's funding and programming until 1990.

However, the construction of ITV as commercial television and a crucial element in the creation of competitive models of broadcasting in Britain is misleading. The legislation for its creation, and later critics such as Curran and Seaton, and Johnson and Turnock, make it clear that ITV was always intended as a branch of British public service broadcasting; funded by advertising but with public service obligations and protection from pure market forces built into its regulatory structure. As Curran and Seaton point out, commercial television in Britain 'was carefully modelled on the BBC,' and '[t]he traditions of public service were inherited by the new authority.' They conclude that despite the organisation of ITV through advertiser-franchise relationships, 'commercial

²⁴⁴ Lawrence Black 'Whose finger on the button? British television and the politics of cultural control' in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 25, no. 4 (2005): 547-575

television was nevertheless formed as a public service.²⁴⁵ Despite the public service values attached to ITV, Johnson and Turnock note that a perception of 'ITV's hybrid position' persisted and consequently affected the value and attention assigned to ITV productions and history, an oversight that this chapter will attempt to address.²⁴⁶ Thus, despite being often over-looked, the public service obligations of ITV shaped early British independent television at a structural level, inflecting not only the ITV companies' relationships with their audiences and critics but with its own regulatory body. It also meant that the provision of television for children, which was not mandated in the 1954 Television Act, became particularly and publicly emblematic of an equilibrium of competition and public service broadcasting which had to be constantly negotiated and re-negotiated by the ITV companies. The continuous balancing of these values and structures would subsequently become instrumental in theorising, producing and organising children's television within ITV, despite the common conception of it as a populist and purely commercial service.

The body which regulated these always nebulous concept of public service values for independent television was the Independent Television Authority (from 1972, the Independent Broadcasting Authority and from 1991, the Independent Television Commission), created as a way of reclaiming independent television from pure commercialism. Upon its inception, its remit was both broad and vague as was the conception of independent television itself, but several criteria were embedded in the 1954 Television Act, among which were the requirements to act as a public service broadcaster and to establish Advisory Committees to protect public interests: these

²⁴⁵ James Curran and Jean Seaton *Power Without Responsibility: Press, Broadcasting and the Internet in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1997), 163

²⁴⁶ Catherine Johnson and Rob Turnock 'Introduction: approaching the histories of ITV' in *ITV Cultures: Independent Television Over Fifty Years* ed. Catherine Johnson & Rob Turnock (Maidenhead, Berkshire and New York: Open University Press, 2005), 3

Advisory Committees were for Religion, Advertising and Children. The Advisory Committees were not intended to stimulate or shape production within the developing network of ITV companies but to regulate and, as their title suggests, advise the ITA upon how the companies' children's television should operate. However, the first set of ITA accounts show that perhaps the Children's Advisory Committee was originally more concerned about children's television within a specific discourse. The Committee first met in November 1955, two months after the first broadcast from Associated Rediffusion, and while acknowledging its duties under the Television Act, stated that '[i]t was difficult for the committee to come to decisions on the advice it would give the Authority until it had evidence over a reasonable period of the impact of programmes on children.'²⁴⁷ The Advisory Committee clearly saw an active role for itself both in advising the Authority and in creating a culture of research within the Authority and committee itself, culminating in a recommendation in 1959 that the Authority should 'support a proposal that selected BBC and ITA advisers should meet to examine those suggestions in the Nuffield Report which were of common concern to both television services.'²⁴⁸

Consequently, in 1959, a committee was convened under May O'Connor, a member of the Advisory Committee since its inception. Both the Nuffield and the O'Connor Reports, however, delineated children's television more as the television that children were watching than the programmes supplied for children. The O'Connor Report recommended that all programmes up until the 9 o'clock watershed should be suitable

²⁴⁷ ITA Annual Report and Accounts 1955-56

[http://gateway.proquest.com.ezproxy3.lib.le.ac.uk/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:hcpp&rft_dat=xri:hcpp:fulltext:1955-045479:33] (accessed September 27th 2014)

²⁴⁸ ITA Annual Report and Accounts 1959-60

[http://gateway.proquest.com.ezproxy3.lib.le.ac.uk/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:hcpp&rft_dat=xri:hcpp:fulltext:1959-048292:31] (accessed September 27th 2014)

for children, rejected most of Himmelweit's recommendations for greater diversity in children's programmes but attacked existing programming for 'the use of "double entendres" in comedy, the "drivel" and "degraded attitude to sex" in pop lyrics and the emphasis on the "sordid aspects of life" in television drama.'²⁴⁹ The following year, May O'Connor expressed her opinion of the ITA and its Director-General, Sir Robert Fraser, freely in a conversation with a member of the BBC's Secretariat, who then passed the details on to his seniors. It was reported that O'Connor had declared 'her by-now familiar disillusionment with the ITA and said how supine she thought it was as a governing body. [...] She said that she particularly disliked Sir Robert Fraser.'²⁵⁰ Despite this personal antipathy and the condemnatory rhetoric of the Report itself, Buckingham concludes that the O'Connor Report was 'ultimately toothless'.²⁵¹ So too, the Children's Advisory Committee, which did not achieve very much during its existence. It was finally disbanded by the ITA after the 1964 Television Act was passed; during this time, production cultures had developed within the ITV companies for children's television that had very little engagement with the Children's Advisory Committee except at the point of criticism.

The children's television that developed at ITV during the early years of its existence was however shaped by other imperatives particular to Independent Television, and which influenced children's television production for decades to come. Originally ITV had been meant as a three-area franchise, situated within London, the Midlands and the North, with several competitive contractors in each franchise area.²⁵² When the government failed to allocate enough frequencies, the ITA was forced

²⁴⁹ Buckingham et al *Children's Television in Britain*, 123-124

²⁵⁰ Jeffrey Milland 'Courting Malvolio: The Background to the Pilkington Committee on Broadcasting, 1960-62' in *Contemporary British History*, Vol.18, No.2, Summer 2004, 76-102

²⁵¹ Buckingham et al *Children's Television in Britain*, 123-124

²⁵² Andrew Crisell *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 85

instead to come up with alternative ways to foster competition between ITV companies: 'In order to maximize the number of contractors and create as much competition as it could the authority split franchises on a weekday/weekend basis.'²⁵³ Crisell situates intra-company competition to get onto the ITV national transmission network as a by-product of the companies' inability of the 'most of the regions [to] deliver big enough audiences to the advertisers. Hence a cost-sharing carve-up swiftly developed in which the four contractors who held between them the three original and most profitable franchises were guaranteed access to the network for agreed amounts of their programmes.' Crisell goes on to suggest that '[t]his meant that the only real competition was between all the contractors and the BBC'.²⁵⁴ Johnson and Turnock summarise Sendall's conclusion that the 'ITA did not realise that competition would come to be regarded as supply of programming to a network in a duopoly rather than competition for audiences and revenue between programme companies.'²⁵⁵

However, the trade in ITV children's television production illustrates at least one arena of intra-company competition, contra to Crisell's assertion. Several regional companies developed children's television drama as a strategic way to access the national network at a time when its supply was unstable. Southern Television in the 1960s formulated a children's drama strategy which was part driven by their own network ambitions and partly by the demands of the ITA, as Lewis Rudd (previously Assistant Programme Controller with responsibility for Children's at Southern) suggested in interview. He stated that, since Southern was one of the most profitable franchise areas, it 'had a lot of money and Southern

²⁵³ Andrew Crisell *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 85

²⁵⁴ Crisell *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*, 86

²⁵⁵ Catherine Johnson and Rob Turnock, 'From Start-Up to Consolidation: institutions, regions and regulation over the history of ITV' in *ITV Cultures*, (15-35) 21

would get chastised by the IBA for not spending enough money on programmes; on the other hand, it was difficult getting them on the network and one of the things that Southern were encouraged to do both by the network and the IBA was children's programmes. So they'd made themselves a niche in children's programmes and that was a mixture of the company's own ambitions and also the way the system worked.'²⁵⁶

Similarly, Patrick Dromgoole of HTV West stated that 'the reason I went for children's [in the 1970s] was because it was the easiest way for us to get onto the network.'²⁵⁷ Contrary to Crisell's assertion then that competition was between all the contractors and the BBC, then, it is apparent that children's television on ITV was a valuable space of intra-company competition, and significantly affected the subsequent production of drama and genre within it.

The ITA also originated another structural feature of the ITV network that would contribute significantly to the production and promotion of such ITV children's television. The Authority originated the regional structure of the ITV, deciding at its inception that independent television should be provided by companies that would represent specific geographic areas across the United Kingdom.²⁵⁸ Thereafter, and up until the Broadcasting Act of 1990, the ITA would also act as organiser and arbiter of the semi-regular contract changes for franchise companies, which could alter the media landscape of Britain on a regular basis, changes which Johnson and Turnock suggest mean that 'analysis of ITV has often been a matter of trying to hit a moving target.'²⁵⁹ Andrew Crisell notes that the 'regional concept was an interesting though not wholly practicable response to Beveridge's complaint about what, in the hands of

²⁵⁶ Lewis Rudd, phone Interview with author, July 10th 2013

²⁵⁷ Jane Killick 'Patrick Dromgoole: Taking the Seventies into the Eighties' in *TVZone Special #5: The Seventies Special* April 1992 (32-37), 33

²⁵⁸ Johnson and Turnock *ITV Cultures*, 5-6

²⁵⁹ Johnson and Turnock *ITV Cultures*, 6

the BBC, was the excessive 'Londonization' of broadcasting'.²⁶⁰ However, it imposed upon ITV companies a contractual obligation to represent their franchise areas through their programming, a commitment which the Authority took seriously. In the 1968 contract round, it was speculated that Television Wales and West lost their franchise due to their reluctance to move their headquarters from London,²⁶¹ and in the 1970s, ATV were repeatedly challenged about their lack of regional representation.

Children's television could however negotiate this requirement by using local locations and regional history within drama: HTV West was notable for using location filming in the franchise area as part of their brand, Programme Controller, Patrick Dromgoole, declaring, 'We wanted to use our assets – Glastonbury, Avebury, Stonehenge, the Severn River [...]'.²⁶² The regional requirement could be used as a marketing device, and ancient monuments and historical sites could be used in fantasy drama as both didactic and narrative spaces. Local spaces and histories became sites in which questions of identity, childhood and the past were contested and recombined as part of a contemporary discourse of what it meant to be a child and a citizen in contemporary Britain. The looser structure of ITV children's television production through regionalism, plurality and the commercial demands of funding driven by advertising was problematic but equally allowed for a more immediate, more acute and arguably a more democratic form of children's television. This is particularly notable in children's television fantasy, which at ITV was more likely to be calibrated to respond to contemporary anxieties and changing production

²⁶⁰ Crisell *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*, 76

²⁶¹ 'How the West was won: Anthony Howard describes the most dramatic coup in last week's commercial TV carve-up : the ousting of Lord Derby's TWW by a group of disorganised Welshmen' in *The Observer* June 18th 1967, 17

²⁶² *TVZone Special #5: The Seventies Special* April 1992 (32-37), 35

teams rather than a unified and centralised structure and ethos as at the BBC. The regional structure further lent itself to the federality of ITV and the subsequent competitive national network arrangements. Inevitably, federal competition and regional representation impacted upon the way that the children's television was produced and broadcast, and the way it was scheduled. Thus, regionality and the network worked as a mutual interchange, but both also created a style and aesthetic for the fantasy drama which emerged across the ITV companies' production cultures in productions such as *Sky* (HTV West, 1976), *Wail of the Banshee* (Central, 1992) and *Noah's Castle* (Southern, 1980) among others.

These production cultures, contrary to popular perception, developed early in ITV history, although arguably they did not reach full flower until the 1970s. ITV companies were not solely commercial purchasers and purveyors of filmed adventure but were in the 1950s developing their own narrative dramas specifically for children, complicating the dichotomy of public service philosophy and commercial broadcasting ethos through children's programming. These early production cultures were necessarily fragmented and unprofitable and when the companies were hit by financial difficulty in 1956 and 1957, due to slow ITV uptake, home-originated drama production declined in favour of the cheaper and more immediately appealing American and Americanised filmed serials.²⁶³ However, children's drama production within early ITV persisted. After 1957, the company producing the bulk of ITV children's serials was Associated Rediffusion but other ITV companies also maintained a slender but relatively steady output of drama serials despite the ongoing appeal of filmed adventures series and puppet programmes, while the ITV

²⁶³ Lewis Chester *All My Shows are Great: the Life of Lew Grade* (London: Aurum Press, 2010), 87 and Rob Turnock *Television and Consumer Culture: Britain and the Transformation of Modernity* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2007), 166

franchises were still being established. The perception of ITV children's schedules as wholly made up of Westerns, cartoons and Lew Grade's adventure series was reinforced, however, by the popular press, the BBC and even the ITV companies themselves as they played upon their reputation as the 'people's television'.²⁶⁴ But after the excoriation of ITV by the Pilkington Committee Report in 1962, the often-overlooked impact of which is detailed by Jeffrey Milland, 'the 1963 Television Act, pushed through by the widely-underestimated Bevins against considerable opposition from both ministers and Conservative backbenchers, greatly strengthened the position of the ITA in relation to the companies'.²⁶⁵ The ITA was, from the early 1960s, determined and equipped to not only change the perception of ITV children's but the way that it was produced and organised.

Armed with this increased leverage, the ITA located this concern against a backdrop of falling child audience figures in the 1960s as much as issues of quality, balance, and the public service requirements which had been tightened by the 1963 Act. BBC children's programmes may have been seen as lacking within the BBC itself, and, retrospectively, by academics but, for the ITA, the BBC output, no matter how fractured in production, no matter how embattled institutionally, was a threat in terms of appeal to the child audience. By 1965, this concern had become pressing enough that it was made the focus of an ITA Consultation on Children's Television which gave impetus to the reinstitution of the network planning committee for ITV children's programmes, the Children's Sub-Committee, and the development of children's departments and programmes which would counteract the public perception of ITV children's as unspecialised, Americanised and populist. Between 1964 and

²⁶⁴ Crisell *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*, 87

²⁶⁵ Milland 'Courting Malvolio', 96

1967, ITV companies produced several critically and commercially well-received children's programmes, such as Rediffusion's crime serial *Orlando*, the science-fiction *Object Z* and its sequel *Object Z Returns*, Southern's adventures *The New Forest Rustlers* and *Danger Island* and an adaptation of T.H. White's fantasy *The Master*, and a production by ABC of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in 1967 but not, seemingly, in enough volume to suit the ITA. The ITA was throughout the 1960s, initiating and enforcing cross-company strategies in order to combat what was seen as the BBC's market dominance, and they key strategy was to encourage and even mandate the production children's television drama. There was discussion of making children's departments mandatory within each company. Clearly, while there were fluctuations within the ITV conceptualisation of children's television, the association of ITV with an unproblematic and commercial 'family' programming is a less stable construction than might be expected.

Children's television schedules on ITV in its earliest years were, despite the dominance of the Big Four, necessarily something of a patchwork. While there were programmes for children produced from the first weeks of transmission by the three first ITV companies, the schedules for the first week also show the competitive, miscellaneous and formally complicated nature of children's schedules in the 1950s. As Buckingham et al note, 'partly due to the regional structure, there was no separate children's department and no period of time set aside and labelled as "children's".'²⁶⁶ It is important to note that children's programming by, and on, ITV was far more complicated in terms of production, tone and scheduling than for the BBC. Due to the federal nature of the ITV national

²⁶⁶ Buckingham et al *Children's Television in Britain*, 83

network and the consequent foreshortened schedules for programming and transmission, children's schedules and programming slots after school and at weekends could, and often did, change from contractor to contractor. There was no unified ITV children's schedule until 1983 when Children's ITV was introduced as a schedule and a brand. ITV companies could organise their local children's schedules as they pleased within the agreed children's programming times: after school on weekdays, afternoon/early evening slots on Saturdays and Sundays, and, from the 1980s, the breakfast television schedules. However, these changes were easier and more advantageous for the big companies who could access more material and afford to shape their schedules to audience and institutional imperatives. This was not however without its dangers. Several ITV companies broadcast popular programmes at times considered children's schedules; Southern, for example, surprisingly ran *Crossroads* in the middle of the children's schedule at 4.35pm.²⁶⁷ ATV also ran into trouble with the other companies and the IBA in the late 1960s when it structured its children's schedules largely around its light entertainment output at the expense of children's drama from other franchise holders.²⁶⁸ A rather pointed clause in the 1967-68 accts for the ITA stated that 'Despite these regional variations [in scheduling] the companies have been able, with occasional Authority guidance, to ensure that the weekly pattern of programmes and the balance between different programme categories has remained substantially the same in all Independent Television areas.'²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ 'Television and radio' in *The Times* January 16th 1968, 12

²⁶⁸ ITA/IBA Archive Box 3996263: File Jan 1969-Dec 1969, Francis Essex (ATV) to Joe Weltman (ITA), September 17th 1969

²⁶⁹ ITA Annual Report and Accounts 1967-68

[http://gateway.proquest.com.ezproxy3.lib.le.ac.uk/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:hcpp&rft_dat=xri:hcpp:fulltext:1968-057292:26] (accessed September 27th 2014)

In the late 1950s and early 1960s a number of organisations and lobby groups began to take an interest in children's television and to articulate their concerns about ITV provision in particular through the press. Edward Blishen, a London schoolmaster at the time, speaking for the Council of Children's Welfare, stated in the *Daily Mail* that 'parents thought that there were too many Westerns, too much American influence, too much violence "for its own sake" and too much "moronic" comedy.'²⁷⁰ This perception of children's television in the 1950s and early 1960s as dominated by Westerns, Americanisation, violence, and poor taste was localised to the ITV companies by the Pilkington Report in 1962 and by ITV's own rhetoric which was articulated around a triumphalist populism, and this conception has persisted until today. Earlier this year, Russell T. Davies, previously show-runner and writer for *Doctor Who* and executive producer on CBBC's *Wizards vs Aliens*, recalled 1950s ITV children's television as almost wholly American.²⁷¹

However, a brief look at the schedules in the first week of ITV transmission demonstrates that this was not necessarily the case: four out of five of the story programmes in Tea-V Time were home-produced. *Hand in Glove* (Associated Rediffusion),²⁷² *Night River*, *Round at the Redways* and *The Little Round House* (Associated Rediffusion) were all produced by the nascent ITV companies, with just one US import on offer on Thursday 29th September 1955, *Hopalong Cassidy* in 'The Devil's Playground'.²⁷³ In fact, a brief survey of ITV children's television from 1955 to 1965 reveals some interesting trends.

²⁷⁰ David Oswell 'Children, Television and Morality, 1950s to 2000s: A Sociological Perspective', unpublished paper presented to the colloquium, Agencies of Child Socialisation in Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Britain, Magdalen College, University of Oxford, June 2008 [http://www.academia.edu/209029/Children_Television_and_Morality_1950s_to_2000s] (accessed January 7th 2016)

²⁷¹ Russell T. Davies 'Was the Fifties the golden age of children's TV?' *The Telegraph*, July 16th 2014

²⁷² According to recent research undertaken by Dr Billy Smart

²⁷³ All information from The TVTimes Project 1955-1985 (BUFVC)

Looking at the London ITV listing from 1955 to 1965, for the first week in October, it becomes apparent that the density of American and Americanised material may be indexed to ITV's wider fortunes. The first year of ITV broadcasts for the selected week shows that as for the first week of broadcast much of the children's material was home-produced: *Passage of Arms*, a historical play, *Mother Michel and her Cat*, *Round at the Redways* and *The Little Round House* (all Associated Rediffusion). Foreign imports and filmed series were fewer: one *Hopalong Cassidy* episode on the Thursday, and *Roy Rogers* and *Robin Hood* on Sunday. Thus, the majority of ITV children's schedules in this week for 1955 were of British origin, with the bulk of American imports and export material reserved for Sunday evenings when the audience was more likely to be family-based.

The following year's schedules were dramatically different. While the ITV network was still in its infant stage, those companies who had begun broadcasting in 1955 had run into financial difficulty due to both higher production costs and lower ITV uptake than had been expected,²⁷⁴ and were having to face brutal financial retrenchment. Consequently, the years in which American and Americanised productions were most concentrated in the children's and wider schedules were 1956 and 1957 when the ITV companies' financial difficulties were at their height. This is, I suggest, no coincidence. The density of American and filmed series in the children's schedules reflected ITV companies' response to their financial nosedive: establishing 'more popularity in the programming' in what Sendall describes as a 'retreat from culture'.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ Johnson and Turnock *ITV Cultures*, 18; Chester *All My Shows are Great*

²⁷⁵ Sendall, *Independent Television in Britain: Volume 1 - Origin and Foundation 1946-62* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 326

Hilde Himmelweit noted the retreat from culture when she carried out her seminal 1958 report, *Television and the Child*, stating, ‘Our trend analysis showed that in the course of the first year the programme balance of ITV became increasingly more narrow, more packaged. One wonders if the Authority could not have taken more notice of this trend and stopped it earlier.’²⁷⁶

The Authority might have taken notice of this but whether they would have necessarily stopped it in 1956 or 1957 is debateable. ‘In the very early days of the ITV service,’ states Rob Turnock in his exploration of early ITV, ‘companies struggled to attract advertising revenue and there was genuine concern that the commercial enterprise would prove a failure. According to the ITA Annual Report for 1955/56, the programme companies were so worried that they reduced the number of more serious programmes such as news, serious talk programmes and classical music by a third.’²⁷⁷

Children’s drama clearly fell under the rubric of serious programming, and the schedules became part of this strategy for growth. The digitised *TVTimes* schedules at TVTip demonstrate that in 1956 and 1957 the London weekday schedules for children broadcast an American import every day of the week and often at weekends in addition to several filmed series such as *Sir Lancelot* and *Robin Hood*. However, by 1958, when ITV’s fortunes had begun to rise and fulfil Thomson’s prophecy that a franchise contract was a ‘licence to print money’, the ITV children’s schedules begin to re-orient themselves in both content and form. The schedules demonstrate that while American and filmed series are still present, increasingly they are fewer and are moreover moving towards animation rather than film. In place of the wholly commercial schedule, there has been an increase in home-produced factual and drama

²⁷⁶ Himmelweit *Television and the Child*, 57

²⁷⁷ Turnock *Television and Consumer Culture*, 87

productions. The increase in the proportion of home-produced programming is by no means overwhelming. Several American series, particularly about animals such as *Lassie*, *Rin Tin Tin*, and *Fury*, were still staples in the children's schedules. But there was a restored and relatively stable presence of home-produced drama for children, as shown by further examination of the children's schedules below, often overlooked in histories of ITV.

The return of children's drama within several years of the ITV financial disaster was due to several historical imperatives, not least of which was public and academic concern about the effect of television upon children. Concerns about violence, self-harm, the breakdown in civic and social order, all coalesced around children's reactions to television, and particularly to commercial television, exemplified in those series populating the 1956 and 1957 children's schedules. Press reports, academic investigation, public response and even the ITA itself raised these concerns. Besides the Authority's responsibility for awarding contracts, it also had a duty 'to satisfy themselves that, so far as possible, the programmes broadcast by the Authority comply with the [...] requirements' of taste, balance, accuracy, British production, regionality, and political impartiality.²⁷⁸ Although the operations of the ITA with regard to contract renewal and change were often criticised as arbitrary, their decisions and the values inherent within the decision-making structures necessarily mediated the production of children's television even from its earliest years. In response to these contractual requirements and, by necessity, the need to develop a child audience who would automatically turn to ITV, Associated Rediffusion, ABC, and even ATV were consistently producing short-run children's drama serials from the inception of Independent Television.

²⁷⁸ Television Act 1954, 20

The consistent presence of home-produced dramas in the children's schedules from 1958 contradicts the popular view that ITV children's provision was primarily structured around American imports. (This was unfortunately derailed in 1961 by the Equity strike which halted production and broadcast of ITV children's serials from November 1961 to April 1962.) As a consequence of Equity's industrial action, there was a return to weekday reliance on American imports throughout these six months. This sudden resurgence of schedules that relied heavily upon imported material coincided with the preparation of the Pilkington Report and may have led to the Committee's condemnation of ITV for triviality and commercialism. Another contributing factor to the overlooking of ITV companies' production is their loss as television programmes.²⁷⁹ Since most of the transatlantic productions were on film, many of them survive as audio-visual material to the present day.

Unfortunately, none of the home-originated serials discussed have survived, or are at least accessible, except in the paratexts which were produced in the publicity and public discourse surrounding them, such as *The Children's Newspaper* (published 1919-1965), which began to run features on television, on production, policy, and programming, from the mid-1950s. Likewise, the *TVTimes* reveals an uneven but continuous production of ITV drama serials for children in conjunction with those imported serials, rather than a schedule purely dominated by foreign material. These sources demonstrate some of the home-originated serials for children during the late 1950s and early 1960s:

²⁷⁹ Johnson and Turnock *ITV Cultures*, 4-5

Mother Michel and her Cat

Associated Rediffusion 1955 single play

The Snow Queen

Associated Rediffusion 1955 serial

The Ambermere Treasure

Associated Rediffusion, 1955-56 serial

Passport to Danger

Associated Rediffusion 1956 serial

Dangerous Holiday

ATV 1956 serial

File on Voronov

Associated Rediffusion 1956 serial

Jim Whittington and his Sealion

Associated Rediffusion 1956 single play

The Sacred Seeds of Tangla Tuk

ATV 1957 serial

Dead Giveaway

Associated Rediffusion 1957 serial

Let's Get Together: World of Darkness

Associated Rediffusion 1958 serial

The Red Dragon

Associated Rediffusion 1958 serial

Into the Net

Associated Rediffusion 1958 serial

The Silver Coin

Associated Rediffusion	1958 serial
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Diamond Bird

Associated Rediffusion	1959 serial
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McFarlane's Way

Associated Rediffusion	1959 serial
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The Highwayman

Associated Rediffusion	1959 play
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The Missing Mercury

Associated Rediffusion	1959 serial
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The Secret of Carrick House

Associated Rediffusion	1959 serial
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Formula for Danger

ATV	1960 serial
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No Man's Island

ATV	1960 serial
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Counter Attack

ABC	1960 serial
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The Little Ship

Associated Rediffusion	1960 serial
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The Roving Reasons

Associated Rediffusion	1960 serial
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Romano the Peasant

Associated Rediffusion	1960 serial
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Francis Storm Investigates

Associated Rediffusion	1960 serial
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Target Luna

ABC	1960 serial
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Biggles

Granada	1960 serial
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Pathfinders in Space

ABC	1960 serial
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Pathfinders to Mars

ABC	1960-1 serial
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The Blackness

Associated Rediffusion	1961 serial
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Pathfinders to Venus

ABC	1961 serial
-----	-------------

Plateau of Fear

ABC	1961 serial
-----	-------------

The Secret of the Nubian Tomb

ATV	1961 serial
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Suggestion of Sabotage

ATV	1961 Serial
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A Brother for Joe

Associated Rediffusion	1961 serial
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The Mask of the Clown

ATV	1961 serial
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City Beneath the Sea

ABC 1962 serial

Secret Beneath the Sea

ABC 1963 serial

Emerald Soup

ABC 1963 serial

Sierra Nine

Associated Rediffusion 1963 serial

Even in the absence of extant audiovisual material, this small selection drawn from paratextual sources demonstrates that there was a steady production of children's television drama by ITV companies throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, despite regulatory and public concerns of wholesale Americanisation. These dramas, while relatively simple in form and content, also engaged with certain key imperatives of early television.

Diamond Bird (Associated Rediffusion, 1959) demonstrated aspects of immediacy in its narrative, reacting reflexively to its historical and institutional context in terms of production and aesthetic. *The Children's Newspaper* reported that it was 'specially topical' as it was 'set in East Anglia, where ITV has just started up.' Writer Elizabeth Beresford told the newspaper "I love the Essex and Suffolk coast anyway; but it struck me as a good idea to make it the scene of my story because of the East Anglian I T V."²⁸⁰ Nor were these purely indiscriminate productions: *Into the Net* (Associated Rediffusion, 1958) was a mystery serial set during a tennis tournament, timed so that it would conclude just before Wimbledon and filmed at Queen's

²⁸⁰ 'Everyone wants the diamond bird' *The Children's Newspaper* October 31st 1959 [http://www.lookandlearn.com/childrens-newspaper/CN591031-004.pdf#search=%22"diamond bird"%22] (accessed January 7th 2016)

Club.²⁸¹ Many of these serials also appeared to use more film than previous BBC serials, shooting on locations as far afield as the Hebrides (*McFarlane's Way*), Naples, Malta and Sicily (*The Roving Reasons* and *Romano the Peasant*), and the slightly less glamorous Kent, where gravel pits doubled for the Khyber Pass in *Frontier Drums* and Egypt for *The Secret of the Nubian Tomb*. This use of film significantly shifted the formal and spatial aesthetics of children's television drama, expanding drastically upon the BBC's previous use of film inserts in the production of children's drama.

This use of film and location shooting was part of an institutional strategy of children's television production at Associated Rediffusion: *The Children's Newspaper* declared 'programme chief John Rhodes' policy of taking viewers outside the studios as often as possible.'²⁸² Of the ITV companies, Associated Rediffusion was the most prolific and comprehensive in producing children's drama, and not coincidentally the longest established. However, ATV and ABC also deliberately invested in children's television drama. All of them to greater or lesser extents produced children's drama that was generically inflected, mostly as children's adventure stories. Where the fantastic was used, it appeared primarily as part of an already existing generic framework of science fiction, specific to the 1950s and early 1960s, situated primarily in anxieties about science, progress and nationality.

Andrew Pixley lists a 1949 production of *The Time Machine* by BBC Television as the beginning of British telefantasy before citing Hazel Adair's children's serial, *The Stranger from Space*, as the next. The same year, Nigel Kneale's *Quatermass* serial

²⁸¹ 'Mystery on the tennis court' *The Children's Newspaper* May 17th 1958
[[http://www.lookandlearn.com/childrens-newspaper/CN580517-004.pdf#search=%22associated rediffusion"%22](http://www.lookandlearn.com/childrens-newspaper/CN580517-004.pdf#search=%22associated%20rediffusion%22)] (accessed January 7th 1958)

²⁸² 'In search of adventure' *The Children's Newspaper* October 28th 1961
[[http://www.lookandlearn.com/childrens-newspaper/CN611028-004.pdf#search=%22john rhodes"%22](http://www.lookandlearn.com/childrens-newspaper/CN611028-004.pdf#search=%22john%20rhodes%22)] (accessed January 7th 2016)

began, and set the tone in British sf for alien invasion narratives and space exploration inflected with a post-war skepticism and twilight imperialism. These 1950s tropes of the fantastic also emerged in children's television. *The Red Grass* (Associated Rediffusion 1959) ran from January to February 1959. *The Children's Newspaper* frames it as a traditional children's adventure story but the uncanny nature of the grass suggests both time fantasy and alterity in the red grass itself :

The Red Grass is an extraordinary herb discovered by an English archaeologist near Athens. Though it stings whoever touches it, it also gives them the ability to see into the future. Two crooks get hold of a specimen and rush off to England to use it for dishonest purposes. Unluckily for them, they are pursued by Donald and Janet Mason, two children aware of their secret.²⁸³

Formula for Danger, an ATV-produced serial, was also fantastic in nature, although presented in the popular 'fantastic science' framework, as scientific discourse began to operate as part of the British zeitgeist. Much was made of the fact that 'Technical students of the Regent Street Polytechnic, London, [...] helped to rig up an extraordinary piece of apparatus' for the serial. 'Consisting of a conglomeration of retorts and test tubes, it will appear to produce results which could revolutionise industry and perhaps cause a world upheaval.'²⁸⁴

ITV was also producing other genres for the children's schedules, suggesting that certain companies, particularly Associated Rediffusion under former BBC producer Michael Westmore, had ambitions towards producing a schedule that

²⁸³ 'Grass that gives a glimpse into the future' *The Children's Newspaper* January 17th 1959 [[http://www.lookandlearn.com/childrens-newspaper/CN590117-004.pdf#search=%22red grass"%22](http://www.lookandlearn.com/childrens-newspaper/CN590117-004.pdf#search=%22red%20grass%22)] (accessed January 7th 2016)

²⁸⁴ 'Boy with a secret which could shake the world' *The Children's Newspaper* [[http://www.lookandlearn.com/childrens-newspaper/CN600305-004.pdf#search=%22formula for danger"%22](http://www.lookandlearn.com/childrens-newspaper/CN600305-004.pdf#search=%22formula%20for%20danger%22)] March 5th 1960

was a miniature of the adults'. When John Rhodes took over in 1958, he continued this expansive and ambitious production culture, and two years later Associated Rediffusion celebrated the five year anniversary of its children's production, with adverts in the national press (see Figs. 3 and 4) and an hour and a half screening of selected children's programmes in the National Film Theatre. Both adverts and screening were framed through one particular fantastic discourse. The press adverts promoting Associated Rediffusion's anniversary Children's Week in May 1960, introduced by two young presenters, Nigel Lambert and Francesca Annis, used Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* to represent television itself as a fantastic medium. The first quotes directly from Alice, 'What is the use of a book without pictures and conversations?' and the second referred to the anniversary as 'this week in Wonderland'. By construing television as a book with pictures and conversations and associating it so directly with Carroll's work, Associated Rediffusion attempted to legitimise their children's programming output, 'the largest contribution of live television to the national network', as a public service.²⁸⁵ At the same time, the ludic nature of the source text suggested that television itself was particularly suited to children and storytelling.

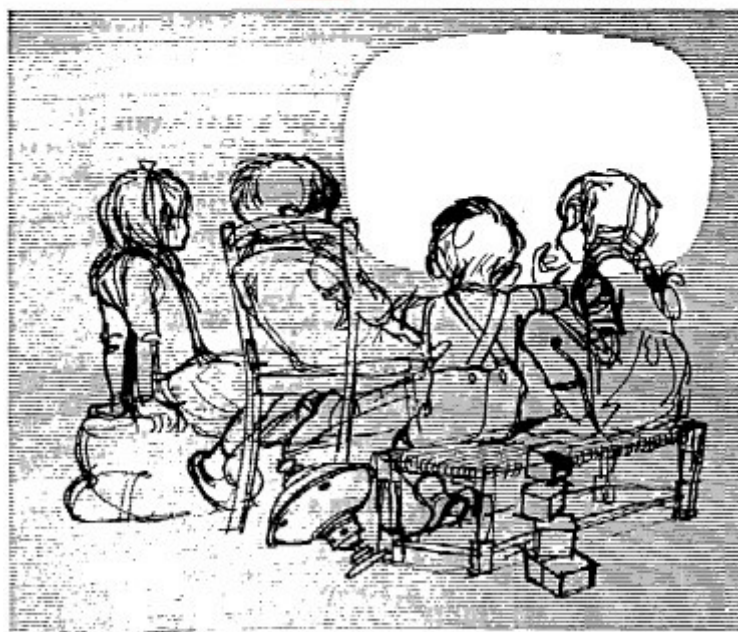
²⁸⁵ *The Observer* September 25th 1960, 2

Show us a story

Few things compare with the fascination of a good story, told well. And this is fortunate, for no good story comes to an end without its audience gaining something in the way of knowledge or understanding.

Audiences of Associated-Rediffusion television programmes for children enjoy story-telling of a new kind – visual story-telling that endows the world of make-believe with movement and life. "What is the use of a book," thought Carroll's Alice, "without pictures and conversations?"

This coming week, from Monday and May to Friday 6th May, Associated-Rediffusion will present as many as nine programmes specially for children. Moreover, as Associated-Rediffusion is the one independent television company to provide programmes for the very young, every age group will have a share of the fun. Puppet shows, competitions, magazine features, travel adventures – the aims are entertainment and information, which, on Associated-Rediffusion children's programmes, are often one and the same thing.



ASSOCIATED-REDIFFUSION

London's Television

Television House, Kingsway, London WC2

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Fig. 3: 'Display Ad 27 for Associated Rediffusion' *The Observer* May 1st 1960, 25

This week in wonderland

'Torchy' has worked more marvels with his magic lamp. Animals have walked and talked like the White Rabbit in 'Alice'. 'Pussy Cat Willum' is still his mischievous self. Romano the Italian peasant boy started the first of his adventures. And there's been fresh news from 'The Roving Reasons' of faraway places and people.

From Monday to Friday of this week, as in every week, Associated-Rediffusion presented a host of programmes specially for children. Moreover, since Associated-Rediffusion is the one independent television company to provide regular programmes for the very young, every age group has had a full share of the fun. The aim has been to inform as well as to entertain, but on the Monday to Friday children's programmes of Associated-Rediffusion, entertainment and information are very often one and the same thing.

Fig. 4: 'Display Ad 10 for Associated Rediffusion' *The Guardian* May 6th 1960, 10

The ITA noted and praised these home-originated dramas in the Annual Accounts 1963-64, stating that the 'tendency in the previous year for home-produced serials to replace American films continued and there were some successful productions, particularly from Rediffusion.'²⁸⁶ Other offerings from Rediffusion in 1963 included *Badger's Bend*, *Smuggler's Cove*, *The Handy Gang*, *Sierra Nine* and *The Barnstormers*. While the

²⁸⁶ ITA Annual Report and Accounts 1963-64

[http://gateway.proquest.com.ezproxy3.lib.le.ac.uk/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:hcnp&rft_dat=xri:hcnp:fulltext:1963-052238:27] (accessed January 6th, 2016)

ITA also noted that they had seen ‘a welcome tendency for regional companies to increase their own output in this field; regional output has included quizzes and magazine programmes, puppet programmes, comedy series and short programmes for the very young’,²⁸⁷ drama was conspicuously absent from the regional companies’ output. It was still too expensive to produce when network access was not guaranteed, and this absence did not go unnoticed. The ITA, still concerned about the use of imported programmes, however, was keen to promote the production of drama by the ITV companies and in 1964 the Authority achieved the leverage by which to achieve this.

In the wake of the publication of the Pilkington Report, the Television Act 1964 consolidated previous Acts from 1954 and 1963 and granted the ITA further regulatory powers. Additional advisory committees were established to safeguard viewers, such as an Education Committee, but the need for a Children's Advisory Committee was done away with, with effect from July 1964.²⁸⁸ This may have been due to the concomitant push by the ITA to review and refine their Family Viewing Policy as mandated by the same act, and thus clarify the kind of programming suitable for children's viewing. The 1964 Television Act mandated that ITV broadcasting should be pre-emptively scheduled in agreement with the Authority, who would also have the responsibility of regulating for quality and balance. It therefore became incumbent upon the ITA to regulate children's television schedules and productions. As the Bill for the Act stated, ‘[N]ow that they have more specific duties and powers the I.T.A. themselves must also take an active part in considering the effect of programmes on children

²⁸⁷ ITA Annual Report and Accounts 1963-64

[http://gateway.proquest.com.ezproxy3.lib.le.ac.uk/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:hcpp&rft_dat=xri:hcpp:fulltext:1963-052238:27] (accessed January 6th, 2016)

²⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 9

and the programmes to be shown when children are watching. The Authority cannot delegate their responsibility in this respect; they may seek advice, but they must make up their own mind and take their own decisions.'²⁸⁹ In short, the ITA had 'complete responsibility for all programmes seen through the ITV system.'²⁹⁰

As a result, the ITA held a Consultation on ITV Children's Television in 1965, the first of three major consultations the ITA would hold to oversee and manage concepts and production of children's television across all ITV companies (later held in 1973 and 1981). In the interim, they had also orchestrated the re-institution of another committee to schedule and regulate children's television, the Network Children's Sub-Committee, to organise and schedule children's programming on ITV, a body that would remain the organising structure of ITV children's television for the next twenty-eight years. However, planning was not the only purpose of the Children's Sub-Committee. In the earliest set of minutes for the Committee, it is noted that a Constitution for the new subcommittee had been established by the Network Planning Committee the previous year (Jan 1964), and 'its terms of reference [...] were "to study the requirements for children's programmes"'. The minutes of the Committee went on, 'one of the functions of the Sub-Committee was to serve as a central point for the dissemination of information between companies and new ideas on children's programmes [...] including the showing of tapes of programmes, or films is available.'²⁹¹ Thus, the regulation of children's programmes on ITV was in some respects moved from retrospective to prospective but these minutes also gestured towards formulating a philosophy of

²⁸⁹ Lords' Sitting on Television Bill: HL Deb 09 July 1963 vol 251 cc1296-
[308http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1963/jul/09/television-bill#S5LV0251P0_19630709_HOL_66]
(accessed January 7th 2016)

²⁹⁰ Peter Black *Mirror in the Corner: People's Television* (London: Hutchinson & Co Ltd, 1972), 162

²⁹¹ ITA/IBA Archive: File 133/9/1 Minutes from Network Children's SubCommittee meeting, April 5th 1965

children's television on ITV, despite the fragmentation and federalism of the companies. This was subsequently reinforced five months later when the Sub-Committee agreed to the ITA's invitation 'to formulate a network policy on children's programmes.'²⁹²

From 1965, then, at the urging of the ITA, the Network Children's Subcommittee would 'study the requirements of children's programmes and [...] serve as a central clearing house of information and new ideas'²⁹³ about children's television on ITV. This injunction laid upon them meant that increasingly ITV companies had to develop a conception of child viewers as a particularised and vulnerable audience, much as BBC Children's had been doing previously, but they also had to develop the idea of a specific ITV children's audience. Although in 1967, Lord Willis described ITV children's TV as 'a fumbling, negative, cynical, confused mess' and the subcommittee as having 'no teeth',²⁹⁴ in October of the same year, the Network Children's Subcommittee sent their parent committee, the Network Planning Committee, a paper detailing the Subcommittee's philosophy and plans for ITV children's television. The same paper indicated the Subcommittee's intentions to improve forward planning for schedules and increase drama production. By 1968, therefore, both the regulatory and the structural mechanisms were in place to develop new ITV children's schedules, more inclined towards public service values and a child audience. The strength of these requirements were compounded by the upsets and challenges of the 1968 contract round, which led to a sea-change in children's

²⁹² ITA/IBA Archive: File 133/9/1 Minutes from NCSC meeting, September 7th 1965

²⁹³ ITA Annual Report and Accounts 1965-66

[<http://parlipapers.proquest.com.ezproxy3.lib.le.ac.uk/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1966-054319?accountid=7420>] (accessed January 7th 2016)

²⁹⁴ Children's Television Programmes: HL Deb 03 February 1967 vol 279 cc1127-40

[http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1967/feb/03/childrens-television-programmes#S5LV0279P0_19670203_HOL_83] (accessed January 7th 2016)

drama production and, I argue, was a direct influence upon the production of Granada's *The Owl Service* (1969).

The Owl Service (Granada, 1969)

Produced and broadcast in the wake of the 1968 contract changes, the 1969 Granada Television adaptation of Alan Garner's *The Owl Service* created a new mode and aesthetic for children's television fantasy on ITV. It simultaneously negotiated several institutional and industrial specific to late 1960s television, the most important of which was the introduction of colour television: '[t]he serial was the first location drama production to be made in colour by Granada'.²⁹⁵

I suggest that *The Owl Service* was a strategic production by Granada, its seemingly anachronistic form, aesthetic and presumed audience negotiating new technology, schedules and ITV franchise boundaries in the late 60s. *The Owl Service* developed a new aesthetic to represent and appeal to modern child audiences as well as representing Granada in their newly acquired weekend schedules, in the wake of the 1968 ITV contract changes. *The Owl Service* expanded the boundaries of Granada's historical 'proclivity for adventurous programming and the pursuit of difficult or contentious topics in documentary and current affairs',²⁹⁶ while responding to quotidian and institutional tensions and anxieties about adolescence, audiences and the nature of independent television in Britain. As an adaptation, *The Owl Service* was as much a text of boundary crossing television for audience, aesthetic, and transmission as its literary source.

Alan Garner's *The Owl Service* was first published in 1967, and tells the story of three teenagers, Gwyn, Alison and Roger, on

²⁹⁵ McGown and Docherty *The Hill and Beyond*, 54

²⁹⁶ Bernard Sendall "The 'Franchise Trail', 1967." *Independent Television in Britain*, pp. 333-366. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1983.

holiday in an isolated Welsh valley. Gradually they each become possessed by the characters and resonances of the Welsh myth of Math ap Mathonwy and in turn the echoes of their own parents' tragic possession. Previous generations had attempted to dispel the violent power struggle of sexual desire, nationality and social class into artefacts such as a painting and a dinner service painted with owls, the Owl Service of the title, but these defer the cycle rather than defuse it and ultimately Gwyn, Roger and Alison must play out the betrayal and violence of the Welsh myth. *The Owl Service* became an immediate bestseller and won both the Carnegie Medal and the Guardian Award for Children's Literature. A year later, Alan Garner was approached to adapt his book for television, and filming began on location in April 1969. *The Owl Service* was filmed entirely on location and shot on 16mm film and in colour rather than in the customary studio-bound style, in black and white and on videotape with film inserts. In both form and content, and most importantly in colour, *The Owl Service* was unlike any other children's drama on television at the time.

The ITV service and franchises were changing drastically in the 1960s and the changes for Granada had direct implications for the production and transmission of *The Owl Service*. In the same year as *The Owl Service*'s publication, Granada was being interviewed by the ITA in the contract reviews. Ultimately, Granada Television kept its contract and perhaps it was just as well; its chairman Sidney Bernstein had upon hearing of the ITA's plans to split the franchise areas responded, 'if the territory of Granada is interfered with in any way, we shall go to the United Nations.'²⁹⁷ However there were some key changes. Granada had to reaffirm its commitment to representing the franchise area's history, culture and spaces. In addition, and

²⁹⁷ Bernard Sendall *Independent television in Britain: Volume 2: Expansion and Change, 1958-68* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1983), 335

with a certain amount of opposition, Granada's franchise area was reduced from Lancashire and Yorkshire, Granadaland, to Lancashire and parts of Cheshire with effect from 1968 but it also went from being a weekday service to a seven day service. Granada Television had lost territory but it had gained time. The weekend schedules were now open to them.

The national networking of ITV children's television was negotiated between the ITV companies at the Network Children's Sub-Committee, which arranged and marketed children's schedules, and monitored the production and nature of ITV children's television. They acted, in effect, as a gatekeeper not only of quality but of franchise holders' presence on the national network. There was a general understanding within the Subcommittee meetings that, in particular, Sunday slots were valuable economically and institutionally, and should therefore represent the best of what ITV children's television had to offer. This not only negotiated the often conflicting demands of what children's television should be and how it could be marketed and scheduled within a discursive framework, it incorporated contemporary ideas of childhood, legislation and institutional values but also the concerns of public service broadcasting. It was also a slot by which companies could compete with each other, and the BBC who also produced Sunday serials for children. Granada's offer to show *The Owl Service* in the ITA-mandated Sunday slot was a declaration not only of its new schedule and the new audiences available to it, but a confident assertion of *The Owl Service* as a production that responded to the Authority's anxieties about quality, public service values and ITV children's drama provision for the modern audience.

The Owl Service diverged from historicised television production practice in several ways. It was shot in colour and on 16mm film on location at Poulton Hall in the Wirral and Dinas

Mawdddy, North Wales. This was a considerable way outside Granada's traditional filming radius of 30 miles from Manchester and in opposition to the reigning production strategy of black and white studio filming on videotape. The three main characters each had their own colour theme: red for Alison, green for Roger and black for Gwyn, intended to suggest the red green and black of pre-1977 plug wiring. The ITA Children's Sub-Committee Minutes from October 1968 show that Granada's rep described the upcoming *Owl Service* as 'an exciting film serial in colour [...]. Miss Young reported it would be ready when colour commences in August.'²⁹⁸ Ronald Bryden suggested in a contemporary review that 'few of the projects stockpiled against the colour rush can be as bold as the eight-part serial which Granada are currently networking at 5.30 Sunday afternoons.'²⁹⁹ In the event, a technician's strike meant that its first transmission went out in black and white.

The symbolism might have been lost but its significance was not: I suggest that Granada deliberately chose to invest in *The Owl Service* both technically and financially in order to negotiate and emphasise their identity within the ITV service as one of the major ITV companies and as innovators in technology and television programming. Had the strike not intervened *The Owl Service* would have been one of Granada's first colour transmissions, shot on film and on location to emphasise the new potential of colour; despite this, it set a new precedent for programming aimed at a new audience of adolescents and weekend viewers, and experimenting both with form and aesthetic. *The Owl Service* identified Granada with its reputation for adventurous programming, its core regions and its new weekend schedule. It also allowed them to compete with the BBC not only in terms of colour transmission, which had

²⁹⁸ ITA/IBA Archive: File 133/9/1 'Appendix A: Future Children's Programmes' Minutes from NCSC January 16th 1969

²⁹⁹ Ronald Bryden 'The Man Who Created The Owl Service' in *The Observer Magazine* January 25th 1970

started on BBC2 in 1967, but in terms of ‘quality’ programming.

Several years before the Pilkington Committee Report of 1962 had rightly or wrongly excoriated ITV for what it saw as a concentration on profit and audience shares rather than public service, and had held up the BBC as a bastion of nationally-inflected quality programming and culture. John Caughie suggests that in the wake of the report its discursive rhetoric gave ITV broadcasters ‘a licence to controversy’,³⁰⁰ and increasingly ITV companies were more concerned that their productions should be associated with public service values, culture and quality. The adaptation of a contemporary award-winning novel could carry over some of the assumed inherent value of the literary text and the awards besides; in addition, Garner himself adapted his own novel for television, thereby creating an idea of single authorship which worked against what many critics saw as mass production culture in commercial television. At the same time, it experimented with the form of drama itself, transposing the individualistic punctuation and tenses of Garner’s literary text to the screen with extreme close-ups, jump-cuts, graphic matches, and claustrophobic framing, a formal and aesthetic innovation that arguably also responded to the ITA’s expressed desire for ‘quality’ children’s drama. (It was less favourably received, however, by Ann Purser for *The Stage*, who described it as ‘distressingly self-conscious’ and suggested that ‘Peter Plummer, who produces, has so lovingly gone to town on the symbols and ritual of Welsh legend that most of it is quite incomprehensible unless you’re trying very hard’.³⁰¹)

³⁰⁰ John Caughie *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism and British Culture*, 86

³⁰¹ Ann Purser ‘Who is this supposed to be for?: The Owl Service, Granada, January 25’ *The Stage* January 29th 1970

Alan Garner, an award-winning author whose family has lived in Alderley Edge, Cheshire, for over three hundred years, was representative of Granada's new franchise area and of the area's history. At the same time, *The Owl Service*, as a text situated in Welsh myth, history and landscape, offered Granada a way to direct its territorial ambitions outside the ITA bounds. Granada had a historical association with North Wales, providing overlap coverage via the Winter Hill transmitter before and after the Welsh franchise holder, HTV Wales, started transmitting in 1962. The bounds of principal and overlap franchise transmission areas were detailed in a map from the 1969/70 ITA Annual report (see Fig. 5). Granada had even produced and transmitted Welsh language programming from its inception until 1962, creating a franchise identity that incorporated its overlap audience in North Wales through language and representation. *The Owl Service* carries through with this extended franchise identity and even expands it further to appeal to a weekend audience made up of child viewers and their families.

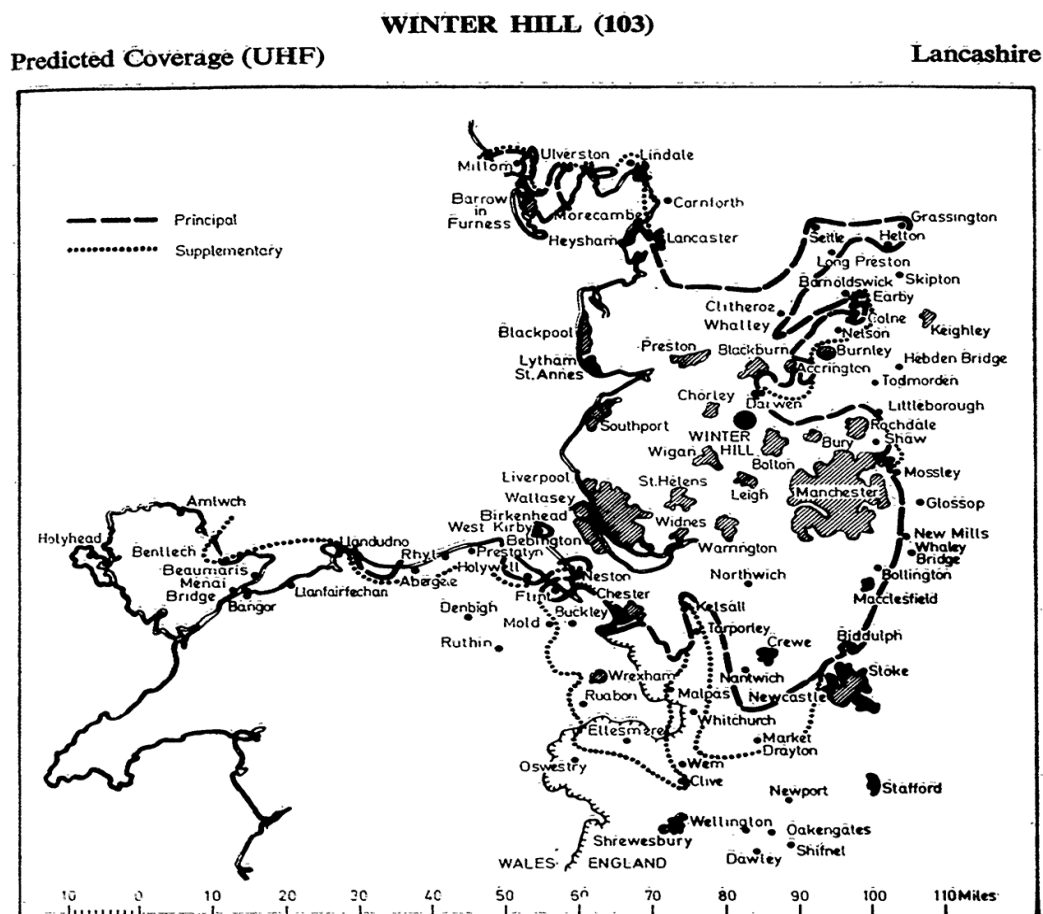


Fig. 5: Map for Granada's Winter Hill transmitter, ITA Report
& Annual Accounts, 1969-70

The Welsh language and accent also function within the text as markers of difference and exclusion: Gwyn secretly listens to elocution records to eradicate his Welsh accent and Roger is offended when the locals deliberately switch into Welsh when they see him coming. In the adaptation, another way in which the English are differentiated from the Welsh is the visual juxtaposing of Welsh labour and English leisure, throughout the serial. This articulation of agency and belonging through language, labour, landscape and myth is beautifully and sensitively written – Garner learned Welsh ‘in order not to use

it'³⁰² – but a novel by an English author about Welsh myth and class oppression could be read as cultural appropriation. Garner states in fact that the novel is 'an expression of the myth found in the Welsh Math ap Mathonwy, and is only incidentally concerned with the plight of first-generation educated illegitimate Welsh males,'³⁰³ suggesting that for him the mythic landscape and mythopoeic storytelling takes precedence over quotidian social and cultural anxieties. In a similar fashion, Granada Television's adaptation, while filmed on location in the Wirral and in Wales, originated from Manchester and overwrote national and regional boundaries.

The production ecology of *The Owl Service* reflects this close historical association and potential appropriation between North Wales and Granada Television's franchise area, not merely in its production locations but in the shifting and slippery nature of regional television and Granada's representation of itself. The television production of *The Owl Service* also transgresses boundaries, negotiating an historical period of spatial, institutional, cultural, and technological flux for the franchise holder. It set a precedent for Granada and for children's television fantasy of formal and aesthetic innovation but one that was perhaps part of what Peirse calls a 'broken tradition'³⁰⁴ of children's telefantasy, an innovative origin point which sparked an inconsistent cycle or local genre.

Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, drama was crucial to children's television services across the regulated duopoly, and producers

³⁰² Alan Garner 'A Bit More Practice' in *The Times Literary Supplement* June 6th 1968

³⁰³ Charles Butler *Four British Fantasists: Place and Culture in the Children's Fantasies of Penelope Lively, Alan Garner, Diana Wynne Jones, and Susan Cooper* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 75

³⁰⁴ Alison Peirse 'A Broken Tradition: British Telefantasy And Children's Television In The 1980s And 1990s' in *Visual Culture In Britain* 2010 11 (1): 109-124. doi:10.1080/14714780903509888.

fought to keep drama production going even when it wasn't institutional policy. The two halves of the regulated duopoly were wrestling with what drama meant to ideas of culture and childhood, and how it fit into public service broadcasting. Both ITV and BBC were producing television in the face of austerity, both technological and creative, yet by the end of the decade both broadcasters had managed to restore fantasy drama that responded to the needs of the child viewer.

Chapter Four: A Golden Age? 1970-1980

This chapter analyses the discourse of British children's television during what was described as its 'Golden Age'. Between 1970 and 1980, both BBC and ITV companies refined their production cultures for children's television, both developing specifically child-centred discourses and productions and conceptions of the child audience in response to historicised understandings of childhood, child development and public service values. This putative golden age was facilitated by industrial and cultural shifts in broadcasting, education and the constitution of British society. Children's television drama becomes during this period a form which realises its potential 'not only to reflect cultural change [...] but also to produce it.'³⁰⁵ A specific discourse and schedule of public service broadcasting for children develops from the late 1960s and reaches culmination in the 1970s in both branches of the regulated duopoly.

With the advent of broader broadcasting times and ambitions reached in the early 1970s, children's television also became more securely anchored in the schedules and in the public eye. In addition, increasing global communication and multiculturalism created a production culture of children's drama, which incorporated fantasy not only as a metaphorical and metonymic mode, or even as a marker of literary value, but as a direct phenomenological way of understanding the world. Mythology and spirituality had from the 1960s become part of the public rhetoric of individualism and in the 1970s transmuted into the anxieties of nationality and social experience, a discourse which increasingly lent itself to television fantasy and sf. John Cook suggests that several 'popular British science

³⁰⁵ Janet Thumim *Inventing Television Culture*, 1

fiction series [for children] mediated in their different ways the utopian hopes and dreams of a new Aquarian order of enlightenment and rationality led by the young.’³⁰⁶ The rise of utopian and by implication anti-utopian television dramas imbued the concept of citizenship, democracy and history with new meanings in the 1970s, a discourse reflected in this chapter’s case studies, HTV West’s *The Georgian House* (1976), and the BBC’s *A Traveller in Time* (1978).

BBC Children’s, 1970-1980

At the BBC, the Children’s Programmes department had been reinstituted from the ashes of the Family Programmes department in 1967. Doreen Stephens had promptly departed for the new ITV franchise London Weekend Television, where she would be head of Children’s before she, along with six other executives, would resign as a gesture of solidarity with sacked Managing Director, Michael Peacock. Of her Family Programmes producers, only Joy Whitby left with her for LWT. The remaining staff were reconstituted into Children’s programmes under Monica Sims, who had been editor of radio *Woman’s Hour*, and became head of Children’s with effect from October 1967.

A new ethos in the Children’s Department, later explicitly articulated to the press by Sims, was perhaps not coincidentally framed in opposition to contemporary accusations by Stuart Hood, the architect of Children’s downfall in 1964, the department ‘was just producing ratings fodder by its approach to children’s programming.’ The article went on to state, ‘A new approach to children’s programming has been evolving at the BBC and Miss Sims, who is one of very few women

³⁰⁶ John R Cook ‘The age of Aquarius: Utopia and anti-utopia in late 1960s’ and early 1970s’ British science fiction television’ in *British Science Fiction Television: A Hitchhiker’s Guide* ed. John R Cook and Peter Wright (London: I.B.Tauris, 2005), 93-113

professionals (or non-professionals) who have a serious word to say in print about television, is not inclined to let anyone pooh pooh the thought and conscience that go into her side of the BBC's output.'³⁰⁷ The development of a new departmental philosophy, shaped by 'thought and conscience', is supported by Briggs' assertion that Sims' new role meant that 'she had to repair as well as create,' and that she 'both restored morale and encouraged creativity.'³⁰⁸ She was also not afraid to raise objections from early on. The first memo available from the newly restored department is from Sims objecting to interruptions to the children's service. Later she would go on to vigorously and vociferously defend her department's slow recuperation of drama, particularly when the department's flagship 1975 production of *The Changes* was threatened by institutional budget deficit. Under Sims, then, the Children's department moved rapidly into a production culture that once again attempted to provide a holistic television service for children but for the 1970s, 'reinventing the culture of children's television – the ways in which it defined children's needs and attempted through its programmes to respond to them.'³⁰⁹

Drama, and its reclamation, was at the forefront of this renaissance, and fantasy drama, synthesising the spectacularity of Madden and the child-centred discourse of the 1970s, was reintroduced as part of this reinvention. Buckingham makes it sound like a *fait accompli* but the sustained and determined attempt to make drama for children from 1967 was by necessity a surreptitious affair. According to Anna Home, the production of drama for children's schedules by the Children's department was not policy; it was instead envisioned that the Drama Group would continue to make any drama for the after-school schedules and the Sunday serial, as they had since drama

³⁰⁷ 'Ratings fodder: it's up to the parents not BBC' *The Stage* Sept 20th 1973, 16

³⁰⁸ Briggs *The History of British Broadcasting, Vol 5: Competition*, 347

³⁰⁹ Buckingham et al *Children's Television in Britain*, 33

production capability was stripped from Children's in 1963. Home stated in interview that consequently the recovery of drama was a departmental operation, operated in stealth and against financial and institutional restriction. Consequently, the production culture that developed in children's drama throughout the early 1970s was 'almost amateur and very entrepreneurial.' Having been one of the earliest entrepreneurs, producing the department's first full drama in ten years in 1971, Home had first-hand experience of the development of drama production: 'Everything was very expansionist and there was money and people were prepared to take risks.'³¹⁰

Sims supported this departmental drive and risk-taking attitude, as was made evident when in 1973 she wrote to then-Controller of BBC 1, Paul Fox, to express her disappointment that the department's ground-breaking ten-part serial, *The Changes*, was being postponed due to overloading on production departments. Sims wrote

I understand the pressures which have led to this, but I wonder whether you have considered the effects on Children's Programmes Department and on the BBC's reputation as a maker of high quality children's drama.

I know you understand the efforts we have made in the last four years to revive drama for children and the success of *Mandog* last year and *Thursday's Child* and *Fish* this year demonstrate the appreciation of the audience.³¹¹

This determination to return drama to children's weekday schedules was also furthered and supported by the interest and investment of Children's Programmes personnel. Home states that rather than being driven by singular producers or

³¹⁰ Anna Home, interview with author, London, June 21st, 2013

³¹¹ BBC WAC B213-002 'The Changes' H.C.P. Tel to C. BBC-1 February 15th 1973

executives, there was a ‘general underswell of feeling’ within Children’s that drama should be an integral part of the children’s schedule, and should be produced by the department as part of a more child-centred discourse. Home stated in interview, ‘I think it was also because there was a change in the hierarchy at that point and the whole thing changed again, but really it was that there were people like me and Marilyn Fox and Paul Stone and what we really wanted to do was drama, and we just went on chipping away’,³¹² underlining the presence of drama, and fantasy drama, as a dual engagement with child audiences and producer preferences.

Although a large part of the early children’s drama output within the department was realist, there were early signs that the fantastic was now seen as part of the balance of the schedule but perhaps more importantly as a mode necessary to children’s cognitive development. The first full drama production made wholly within the department was *Joe and the Gladiator*, a story of a rag and bone man and his horse set on location in South Shields, made under severe financial and industrial constraints. However, just one year later, the department broadcast *Mandog*, a 6-part science fiction serial commissioned from Peter Dickinson, about a dog having the mid of time traveller transferred into him. Although *Mandog* was never released commercially, Kaleidoscope lists it as still existing in the BBC archives. It is, most likely, still extant because it was shot entirely on film and on location in and around Southampton. The production makes use of the location filming by deploying long tracking and panning shots of the local landscape but introduces the fantastic early in the narrative when one of the time travellers walks through a closed garage door.

³¹² Anna Home, interview with author, London, June 21st, 2013

Although *Mandog* ‘was amateurish by Anna Home’s own admission, roughly shot and edited all on film’, it along with other productions of the very early seventies, such as *Fish* and *Joe and the Gladiator*, were generically and formally indicative of the direction subsequent drama for children would take.³¹³

Home stated in interview that *Mandog* was commissioned from children’s author Peter Dickinson, stating, ‘I was always for trying to break boundaries and to do new things and to do them differently and I always wanted to go that bit further than had been gone before. Someone like Peter, if you gave him something and said ‘Just go at it,’ you would get something really unusual and that’s where that came from really.’³¹⁴

Home’s career-long strategy of collaboration with children’s authors, incorporating both adaptations and commissions, created a specific production culture for drama within the Children’s department, and one that took primacy when she became Executive Producer for all drama within the department in 1975. This not only indicated Home’s commitment to the dramatic form but the department’s achievements in formalising and increasing the production of drama within a child-centred model of children’s television production within just eight years.

From 1975 onwards, with the appointment of Home to a formalised executive position with regards to children’s drama, the reinvention of the children’s department and its child audience was nearly complete. However, the foregrounding of drama may have been as much a response to competition within the regulated duopoly as it was a departmental drive. Following an ITA Consultation on Children’s Television in 1973, the ITA had strongly encouraged the ITV companies to move away from acquired narrative towards ‘quality ITV-produced drama in

³¹³ McGown and Docherty *The Hill and Beyond*, 66

³¹⁴ Anna Home, interview with author, London, June 21st, 2013

children's weekday time on a regular, planned basis.³¹⁵ Children's drama was once again part of the competitive mechanism of children's television within the regulated duopoly, and therefore both broadcasters needed to modulate their drama to act as part of children's schedule recognition, which the 1981 Consultation identified as key to the BBC's contemporary ascendancy.³¹⁶ One of the production culture aspects of the 1970s was Home's development of the relationship between children's television drama and children's literature that was becoming increasingly reflexive during this period. The dynamic interaction between children's literature and drama did not merely manifest itself in adaptations, although that genre was still very much a key part of children's drama for the BBC. However the generic outlines for adaptations broadened and became more flexible.³¹⁷ Peter Dickinson's trilogy became *The Changes*, but the adaptation was done by Home in collaboration with Dickinson himself, a practice that Home encouraged although with certain caveats. When asked whether there was anything that she looked for in particular in a property for adaptation, she replied:

You always looked for how you could retain the original ethos and intention of the book but transform it. Television or film is not ever the book; it is a version of the book but a version which tries to keep the essence of it. [...] The television ending is completely different from the book ending, so you do change a lot but I think you've always got to have respect for the original material. And I think if the original writer is around, it's

³¹⁵ ITA/IBA Archive Box 3995724 File 225/15 Children's Consultation, Vol.1 'Introduction' Sir Brian Young in *Children's Programmes on Independent Television: A Report of an IBA Consultation Held in Cambridge, July, 1981* September 1981, 1

³¹⁶ Ibid, 4

³¹⁷ Anna Home 'Children's Books and the Media: The Patrick Hardy Lecture' in *Signal* 82 (Jan 1, 1997), 31.

better if you can consult but make absolutely clear that you have the final decision.³¹⁸

In this way, Home built up a cadre of children's authors that could be used not just as sources for children's drama, but as on-going collaborators. Nina Bawden's novels were used throughout the 1960s and 70s by both BBC Serials and later the Children's Department as the source for drama. Peter Dickinson was commissioned to write *Mandog* as well as collaborating with Home on the adaptation of his trilogy *The Changes*, one of the most ambitious television fantasies for children on the BBC weekday schedule. In 1990, BBC Wales adapted his 1973 book, *The Gift*, as a co-production with Red Rooster Films.

Helen Cresswell wrote *Lizzie Dripping* and *Moondial* for television, texts which then went on to become novelisations and *The Bagthorpe Saga* was later adapted as children's comedy series. Consequently, while BBC Children's was still using literary associations as markers of quality, the reflexive nature of the adaptation of contemporary books and collaboration with contemporary authors situated this value as part of modern culture and literacy rather than mere paternalism.

This dialectic of 1970s' modernity and ahistorical culture was further negotiated by the increased use of location filming in children's drama. Home explicitly located this production strategy as part of an attempt to more closely engage with and reflect, as Home suggests in her interview, contemporary Britain and contemporary children's culture. She further situated this aesthetic choice as particularly germane to the production of children's fantasy drama. Even in children's fantasy, or perhaps especially in children's fantasy, realistic locations and filming conventions were used to anchor the

³¹⁸ Anna Home, interview with author, London, June 21st, 2013

programmes within a wider verisimilitude and modern context. This is especially true as they move into more extensive filming on location, shooting in recognisable cities or towns as often as the countryside. One of the more notable serials of 1970s' BBC Children's would not have been filmable had it not been for the extensive location filming and, perhaps more importantly, the visual dichotomy between tradition and modernity, city and landscape, that allowed the production to set up its narrative. The adaptation of Peter Dickinson's *The Devil's Children* was part of the resurgence of the Matter of Britain in popular culture in the 1960s and 1970s, locating the sudden, apocalyptic reversal of modern progress around the figure of Merlin. The Britain of Arthur and the Britain of the 1970s were juxtaposed, culturally, philosophically and, in the television adaptation, visually through the visual opposition of contemporary urban architecture and social organisation with a more atavistic, rural-based construction of society and work. The BBC WAC at Caversham holds several production files about *The Changes*, which detail the extensive location filming they do outside schools and in rundown city suburbs in Bristol, as well as on farms and in fields, to establish the differences between modern Britain and the Britain after it regresses to medievalism (one which is strangely at odds with the rather earlier chronology of the Arthurian legends).

Much of the fantasy in *The Changes* was created through these visual oppositions rather than visual effects, and a similar approach is used in 1978's *The Moon Stallion*, in which all of the fantasy is created in-camera through performance, editing and camerawork as well as paratextually, through wildtrack sound. The same formal and textual strategies are used in the 1978 production of *A Traveller in Time*, which, like *The Moon Stallion* and *Tom's Midnight Garden*, was directed by Dorothea Brooking.

'Time everlasting': A Traveller in Time (BBC, 1978)

The BBC's adaptation of Alison Uttley's *A Traveller in Time* was broadcast in January 1978, and was directed and produced by Dorothea Brooking, known for her sensitive, polished children's dramas for the BBC. The original text, first published in 1939 and reflective of Uttley's nostalgic memories of her own Derbyshire childhood, told the story of Penelope Taberner, one of three children who go to stay with their aunt and uncle at Thackers, an Elizabethan farmhouse. In the historic house, Penelope is able to step back through time to the sixteenth century when then-owners of Thackers, the aristocratic Babington family, were involved in a plot to free Mary Queen of Scots, held at nearby Wingfield Manor at the order of her cousin, Elizabeth I. This escape plot was based on the popular legend that while Mary was imprisoned there, she was visited by fellow Roman Catholic and admirer Anthony Babington disguised as a gypsy. He would subsequently conspire with English and Spanish Catholics to assassinate Elizabeth and put Mary on the throne in the ill-fated Babington Plot. While the events of the novel are fictionalized, therefore, the places, characters and political background are real.

Like HTV West's *The Georgian House*, *A Traveller in Time* is located around a fictionalized representation of quotidian historical events, and this tension between history and drama is located around the material and mediated re-production of historical space. Where the HTV production recreated the Georgian House in painstaking and expensive detail in the studio, down to 'door handles and lock escutcheons'³¹⁹, the BBC adaptation complicates levels of reality and fiction by filming within the quotidian historical spaces on location.

³¹⁹ Jill Laurimore 'The Georgian House: From the Writer's Perspective' in *The Georgian House* DVD notes (Network DVD, 2010)

Thackers was recreated at Dethick Manor Farm, previously Dethick Manor and Uttley's original inspiration for the novel. The farmhouse was the locus for the historical narrative and was also central to the escape plot in which the Babingtons and their retainers attempted to tunnel from Thackers to Wingfield Manor to free the Queen of Scots. However, not only was the Babingtons' ancestral home used as a location, but the Queen's captivity was filmed in the ruins of Wingfield Manor itself. The location of the drama in and around quotidian historical locations is reminiscent of Colin McArthur's critique of the narrator within factual historical programs:

This locating of the narrator in the actual substance of his narration offers a quasi-talismanic guarantee of truth: the place actually exists, therefore what is said must be true.³²⁰

A Traveller in Time's location of characters in the actual substance of the drama creates a space through which contemporary ideas of history, heritage and education could be invoked and problematized. The timeslip becomes a nexus of not only historical periods but a way of troubling the binaries of knowing and learning, reality and fiction, belonging and exclusion, and childhood and adulthood.

In her analysis of children's timeslip literature, Tess Cosslett suggests that Penelope is one of those '[c]hild protagonists who rediscover a sense of territorial belonging, by simply returning to ancestral homes and connecting to their "real roots"'.³²¹ Penelope is however not a Babington, although her twentieth-century education allows her to move amongst them. Penelope's "real roots" are with Dame Cicely Taberner, the Babingtons' cook, suggesting a 'history from below'. Affiliation with Thackers in the past, as in the present, is not associated

³²⁰ Colin McArthur *Television and History* (London: BFI, 1978), 29

³²¹ Tess Cosslett "'History from Below": Time-Slip Narratives and National Identity' in *The Lion and the Unicorn* Volume 26, Number 2, April 2002, (243-253) 246

necessarily with ownership but with community, responsibility and continuity. The feudal ideology of the narrative is consequently glossed over in favor of a dialectic of past and present values. Penelope can, like Abbie and Dan in *The Georgian House*, move between the physical and ideological spaces of the past, and suggest “a new version of the national past”, located ‘in the practices of oral, local and family history, and [...] particularly evident in the way that history is taught in the schools, and in the institution of “heritage” sites and activities.’³²² However, the disjuncture between the two historical ideologies is subsumed in the continuity of Thackers itself.

While Thackers is shown as an historic house, it is also a contemporary domestic space, making it a site of lived and ‘living history’. Elizabethan objects are used by the Taberners as everyday items in the 1970s as are old traditions, such as herbalism, thereby constructing the rural as the site of historicity and continuity. Penelope rejects the London of her family and home, stating that their modern kitchen ‘isn’t warm and comfortable’ like Thackers’ adding later, ‘I wish I lived here. I’d stay here forever.’ Penelope’s visits to Thackers in the novel take place over several years accompanied by her family from London, but in the adaptation her visit is made in isolation and only lasts several weeks as she recovers from pneumonia. The adaptation therefore further compresses and dislocates time, making Thackers a place where staying forever might be possible. Penelope’s ability to see the Babingtons, ‘quite alive, like you and me!’, a hereditary trait of the Taberners, makes her ‘always-already’ part of a family and community identity, organized around the house and to a lesser extent the landscape. Perry Nodelman points out that Thackers is both the narrative and ideological locus of the production: ‘the heart of the novel’s

³²² Tess Cosslett ‘History from Below’, 244-245

meaning', indicating that '[t]he passage of time means that everything must change, so that everything must die; but the continuance of the house and of old ways for doing things within it means that time's passage does not matter, for despite it, things do continue in the same way.'³²³ The use of the quotidian locations reinforced these values of authenticity and continuity within the serial, but necessarily had implications for its aesthetics.

In contrast with *The Georgian House*'s studio-bound production on videotape, *A Traveller in Time* was shot largely on location in Derbyshire on film and around the actual physical sites associated with the historical events and characters. The BBC serial, like the HTV production, questioned the concept of history, childhood and learning in the 1970s but its exploration of the historical ideology had a different focus. Where *The Georgian House* locates history and pedagogy within a museum and uses timeslips to expose the characters to lived history, *A Traveller in Time* uses a farmhouse that had been in the family for centuries and the persistent traditions, timeframes and language of the locality to make contiguous the lived histories and heritage separated by four centuries. History in *A Traveller in Time* is always-already there, not just as part of the heritage discourse but as part of everyday, domestic life. The house, traditions and artifacts are shown being used in both time periods, establishing a continuity of regional and family history: modern-day Aunt Tissie 'still stick[s] to the old-fashioned herbs' to keep moths from the linens, a practice also shown in the historical narrative, and later declares, 'This old pan's been at Thackers as long as I can remember, and before that. It's almost as old as the house.' 'Perhaps,' suggests Penelope, 'it was used by the Babingtons!' Thackers' domestic spaces and practices are

³²³ Perry Nodelman 'Interpretation and the Apparent Sameness of Children's Novels in Narrative Theory and Children's Literature' in *Studies in the Literary Imagination* (18)2 1985 (5-20), 8

history, a 'rootedness' arguably lost in the 1970s. The production's expansive, even cinematic, aesthetic created by the primarily filmed production of *A Traveller in Time* on location in the houses, landscape and culture of Derbyshire contributes to this construction of place and mood, reflecting Peter Hunt's statement that within English fantasy, 'places mean.'³²⁴

Penelope therefore enters another time, as Abbie and Dan do in *The Georgian House*, but due to the construction of the past as accessible and ideologically contiguous through place and family, she does not reject the 'social cement' of the historical period as they do. Just as the places, spaces, and objects exist in both eras, so too do the values of loyalty to the land, the local community, and the continuation of Thackers. Despite the nationwide, historical shifts in religion and state, the serial suggests that these can be reconciled if core local values are maintained; it is implied that Anthony Babington's plot fails because he in turn fails to uphold the sanctity of Thackers and his responsibilities to the land and his estate. He places the national above the regional: Francis says to Penelope, 'I'm afraid Anthony will be ruined, whether he saves the Queen or not. The money is running away like the River Darrant.' Penelope might turn away from the dominant national ideology and history located around the Virgin Queen but she does so in order to protect Thackers. Paradoxically, she attempts to change history in order to preserve history. The ideological conflict is therefore displaced from the difference between past and present to other historical tensions: regional and national histories, Catholic and Protestant, received history and lived history. Consequently, *A Traveller in Time* is less radical in its recovery of history than *The Georgian House* while still incorporating the resistant formal strategies which Cosslett

³²⁴ Peter Hunt 'Landscapes and Journeys, Metaphors and Maps: The Distinctive Feature of English Fantasy' in *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* Volume 12, Number 1, Spring 1987, (11-14), 11

identifies in timeslip fantasies: ‘other’ histories and other epistemologies.

These other histories may be meta-textual as much as diegetic: Dolly MacKinnon posits that Uttley’s original text ‘voiced counter-narratives that demonstrated personal (predominantly but not exclusively female), collective and national threads in the historical narrative, such as gender roles, fighting for religious and political tolerance and women’s rights.’

(2011:813) ‘Furthermore,’ MacKinnon points out, ‘Uttley was contributing to a long matriarchal tradition of historical fiction about Mary, Queen of Scots, that questioned the standard masculinist British History narratives.’³²⁵ These counter-narratives suggest some of the previously marginalized discourses which the new pedagogical emphases of history in the 1970s, ‘[i]nnovative methodologies, an interest in the experiences of the dispossessed and oppressed and a new openness to influences from sociology and anthropology’, could recover both in education and, I argue, children’s television drama.³²⁶

These alternative historical perspectives, the revelation of previously hidden information, and new understandings of time, reality and learning are also suggested in the aesthetic of *A Traveller in Time*. The slipperiness of narrative time and subjectivity is reinforced by the use of unusual perspective shots. The serial opens with an establishing shot of the Derbyshire landscape from within the train Penelope is traveling on, rather than as a wide, exterior shot. Upon her arrival at Thackers, the house is viewed first from inside the moving Land Rover before it cuts to an exterior, static shot.

³²⁵ Dolly MacKinnon ‘“That brave company of shadows”: Gender, National Identity, and the Formation of Children’s British History in Alison Uttley’s *A Traveller in Time*’ *Women’s History Review* 20, no. 5 2011 (809-827), 811

³²⁶ Chris Husbands, Alison Kitson and Anna Pendry *Understanding History Teaching* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 2003), 10

Later in the serial, an Anglican mass opens with a shot from the empty pulpit before moving through the church itself, suggesting alternate subjectivities, temporal shifts and relationships with spaces. This is reinforced most strongly in the final episode when Penelope visits Wingfield Manor. As her uncle's Land Rover pulls up to the ruined castle, it is seen from one of the empty windows, high above, suggesting that it is being watched by some unknown viewer. Subsequently, a similar window is seen in the Queen of Scots' room. These alternate subjective shots work as part of an aesthetic of mutable space and time, suggesting different perspectives on the *mise-en-scène*; a hidden history to be revealed depending on where the camera moves. This is reinforced by Brooking's use of cross-cutting or reverse shots from alternate perspectives, reframing angles of vision which reveal additional information within the scene. One of these occurs within the sequence with Queen Mary, when prior to the timeslip, Penelope is shown sitting on the same ruined stone window frame. This shot then mixes into one of the Queen sewing, and the following scenes focus upon her exchange with her lady in waiting, Seton. Subsequently, a reverse shot of a wider view of the set reveals Penelope still sitting on the same windowsill as a contemporary, but secret, audience to this historical event. This perspectivist approach to editing, alongside the alternation between subjective and objective shots, works to create an unstable relationship of time and reality.

The grammar of television therefore creates time travel within *A Traveller in Time*, complicating the difference between past and present. There is no fantastic touchstone for the timeslip such as the African carving in *The Georgian House*; there are however several artifacts which appear in both time periods and indicate rather than effect the timeslip. Chief among these is the locket containing a portrait of Mary Queen of Scots that Anthony

Babington loses in the sixteenth century and Penelope finds in the twentieth. Another is the ribbon which Francis purchases for Penelope at a fair, and which she loses when she timeslips back to the future. Its appearance and disappearance from scene to scene indicates the time periods through which Penelope is moving, and its restoration by her aunt who has found it in an old chest marks her departure from Thackers in the serial's finale. Thackers is haunted not just by the Babingtons but by the physical objects which they made, used and loved, creating a contiguous heritage and suggesting phenomenological approaches to history which may again correspond with suggested changes to teaching history. 'For example,' states the Schools Council's *A New Look at History*,

[M]any history teachers have noted that adolescent pupils, given the opportunity, can respond to the past in a positive way; they can get excited when they touch some object which has survived from the past, or when they see Elizabeth I's signature, whether actually or in facsimile.³²⁷

These phenomenological encounters reflect the strongly subjective and sensuous reactions Penelope has to the world in and around Thackers in the original text, but also reflect an increasing drive in pedagogy to move outside the merely empirical into the affective. These objects whether in terms of everyday use or the haptic encounter within pedagogy collapse time, and encourage historical learning about objects' production and use. This occurs diegetically when Penelope is given the bobbin boy, a carving made by Jude the kitchen boy, which she admires in the 1970s before encountering its maker in the sixteenth century. The bobbin boy also condenses space,

³²⁷ British Schools Council *A New Look at History: Schools History 13-16 Project* (Edinburgh: Homes McDougall Ltd., 1976), 7 [<http://www.schoolshistoryproject.org.uk/AboutSHP/downloads/NewLookAtHistory.pdf>] (accessed January 7th 2016)

allowing a trapped Penelope to communicate psychically with the mute Jude, a lovely sequence which cuts between Penelope and Jude spatially located to the left and right of the screen, as if in dialogue. The Schools Council publication continued:

[M]any adolescents have an ability to imagine the past, to recreate its actions and its thoughts in drama or role-play, to sympathize with people from the past in discussion or dialogue and even to hero-worship and identify themselves with some of the people of the past. Finally, [...] most pupils are capable of the more passive ability of receiving the past and of escaping from the present into it, whether through a story told by a teacher, or through film, or through a book (either of history or historical fiction).³²⁸

A Traveller in Time is therefore arguably as historically valuable as *The Georgian House* or even pedagogical methods in writing, re-writing and perhaps more importantly creating a sympathetic interest in history for child and adolescent viewers, a view endorsed by the Schools Council and its pedagogical initiatives of the 1970s. However, it is also significantly more aesthetically and ideologically restrained. Is this an aspect of BBC children's production or a natural tenor given Brooking's canon of 'lovely weepies'? It's both. HTV West was from an early stage in its production culture of children's fantasy drama already engaging with controversial subjects to meet its regional requirements and to access the national network. While the BBC was in competition with ITV, it had no such internal spur to make controversy a sellable feature. Fantasy became a reflective rather than necessarily a radical mode, due to institutional forces in each company.

³²⁸ British Schools Council *A New Look at History: Schools History 13-16 Project* (Edinburgh: Homes McDougall Ltd., 1976), 7 [<http://www.schoolshistoryproject.org.uk/AboutSHP/downloads/NewLookAtHistory.pdf>] (accessed January 7th 2016)

Children's ITV, 1970-1980

In 1968, several years of structural and industrial change had come to fruition for ITV. Since the 1964 Television Act, the ITA had been empowered to regulate the companies' output and had gained control of the transmitters, and the Children's Advisory Committee, which had previously advised the ITA on broadcasting for children (including Schools) had been disbanded. In its place, the ITA had recommended the reformation of the Network Children's Sub-Committee, which had required delegates from all major companies to attend, and had, almost immediately, turned its regulatory eye on children's television on ITV, beginning with a Consultation on that subject in 1965. Further pressure brought to bear on the ITV companies about children's television and the contract changes in 1968 meant that by the time the 1970s arrived, ITV children's television and its production, regulation and transmission was increasingly regarded as a specialised, protected output and a sacrosanct element of ITV's establishment as a public service broadcaster.

This was reinforced by the development of strongly defined and entrenched children's departments at major companies like Thames, formed out of the merger of previous children's stalwart Rediffusion and ABC. Thames' children's output was bolstered by the presence of Lewis Rudd as the Head of Children's (moving from Rediffusion where he had been Head of Children's since 1966 to Thames upon the 1968 merger). As a major company, Thames had a contractual obligation to make programming for the network where large and small regionals did not; however, Thames was the one of the few ITV major company to consistently produce children's drama throughout

the 1970s.³²⁹ However, even a major company such as Thames faced problems when trying to produce children's television fantasy drama. In interview, Lewis Rudd stated, 'Thames though, in a lot of ways, inherited from ABC a system of control by the facilities departments over production departments and it was very difficult to break loose from of that.' He also noted difficulties with the formal properties he saw as necessary to production of children's drama during this period, stating that 'on the whole at Thames, [...] our basic output was still 80% studio, 20% shot in one day on film, and that's going it because then you were getting five minutes in a day which was quite hard going.'³³⁰ Rudd 'resented [this ratio] because I always felt that children's drama, even more than adult drama, needed action as opposed to 'two boards and a passion'. Adult drama can be entirely dialogue, two people in a room, but you can't do that with children's drama. You need some form of action and activity, so we were always a bit hamstrung by the fact that we were trying to do so much in the studio.'

Rudd subsequently moved to Southern Television in 1972 as an Assistant Controller of Programmes but Southern's 'main network programming had been children's and that's why they thought that I was a good fit with them, so probably at least fifty per cent of the programming I was responsible for would have been children's'.³³¹ Southern had carried through from the 1960s its policy of producing children's drama for the national network. It might be thought of as adventurous that Southern, despite the fact that it was a regional, albeit one of the largest and most profitable regionals, had specialised in making children's drama. In fact, Southern's profitability was precisely

³²⁹ ITA/IBA Archive Box 3995724 File 225/15 Children's Consultation, Vol.1 'Introduction' Sir Brian Young in *Children's Programmes on Independent Television: A Report of an IBA Consultation Held in Cambridge, July, 1981* September 1981, 27

³³⁰ Lewis Rudd, phone Interview with author, July 10th 2013

³³¹ Ibid

the reason it had developed a production culture of children's drama. As previously stated in chapter two, the rationale for this had been driven by the ITA: according to Rudd, the company 'had a lot of money and Southern would get chastised by the IBA for not spending enough money on programmes; on the other hand, it was difficult getting them on the network and one of the things that Southern were encouraged to do both by the network and the IBA was children's programmes. So they'd made themselves a niche in children's programmes and that was a mixture of the company's own ambitions and also the way the system worked.'³³²

As a result, Southern could afford to spend more money on children's drama and this was demonstrated not only in the production values of programmes like *Worzel Gummidge*, *Noah's Castle*, *The Ravelled Thread*, *The Famous Five*, *Midnight is a Place*, *The Flockton Flyer*, *Operation Patch*, *Rogue's Rock*, and most visibly *Freewheelers*. Elinor Groom details the role of *Freewheelers* and the Southern boat as moving the company's production culture towards a more location-based and regionally-specific aesthetic and output.³³³ Her article reinforces Rudd's assertion that 'Southern was, in some ways, better than [Thames in using film]. Southern, at this time, were doing a programme called *Freewheelers* which did have two to three days of filming per episode and I remember that being a real luxury compared with anything I'd been doing at Thames'³³⁴. Since Southern could afford to spend money, the production of fantasy drama was less of a resource drain and risk. Consequently, fantasy dramas such as *Worzel Gummidge* could afford all film and all location rather than studio and video shooting, as could several other contemporaneous

³³² Lewis Rudd, phone Interview with author, July 10th 2013

³³³ Elinor Groom 'The South, Southern and Southerner: Regional Identity and Locations in Southern Television's *Freewheelers*' in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 34, no. 3 (2014): 434-451.

³³⁴ Lewis Rudd, phone Interview with author, July 10th 2013

productions such as the dystopian *Noah's Castle*. *Noah's Castle* (1980) used extensive location filming and large scale set shots and effects to represent a society on the brink of hyperinflation and total social collapse.

By the early 1970s, several further changes had occurred to make the production of children's television a much more attractive proposition for all the ITV companies, including even the smaller regional companies for whom the production of expensive children's drama was a speculative endeavour. Chief amongst these was the introduction and consolidation of colour television as a medium and a technology. With the coming of colour studios, previous mechanisms for inlay and inset could be extended into electronic colour switching within the studio, known as Colour Separation Overlay in the BBC and Chromakey in ITV companies. Subsequently, as Rudd suggests, children's television, and fantasy particularly, could be broadened both in production and aesthetic. 'Fantasy's a bit of an obvious area for children,' Rudd stated, 'and as television techniques, like the use of Chromakey, blue-screen, whatever you called it, and different techniques developed, it became easier to do different forms of fantasy as well.'³³⁵ Consequently, the risks associated with speculative production could be reduced. Colour Separation Overlay would allow for the imbrication of images in a way that vision mixing could not sustain, creating new aesthetics and new spaces for television, and making it easier to attempt new, if not experimental, productions.³³⁶

However, there had been claims by the ITV companies in the late 1960s that the introduction of colour was being jeopardised by the high percentage of the levy imposed on the IBA by the

³³⁵ Lewis Rudd, phone Interview with author, July 10th 2013

³³⁶ See Leah Panos, 'Stylised Worlds: Colour Separation Overlay in BBC Television Plays of the 1970s' *Critical Studies in Television: An International Journal of Television Studies* 8, no. 3 (2013): 1-17, 1 for a more developed consideration of CSO

Exchequer, and even that some of the smaller ITV companies could be forced into bankruptcy by the demands of the levy.³³⁷ After negotiation between the IBA and the government, the levy was reduced in 1971³³⁸ and transferred from advertising revenue to profits in 1973. As a result, the introduction of colour technology could proceed and ITV finances were freed up on the understanding that the money would be invested in the production of 'quality' programmes. These financial and structural changes, in conjunction with an IBA push for home-produced children's drama rather than acquired material from 1974, meant that, in addition to Southern, several other regionals boldly attempted to tap into the ITV children's television drama market in the 1970s.

One of the most notable and distinctive of these in terms of ambition and output was HTV West. Several factors worked in favour of HTV West's venture: the relaxation of the Exchequer levy, its relative independence as one half of HTV Wales and West, and the structure and ambition of production under Managing Director, Patrick Dromgoole. The result would be a strongly individual company, committed to producing distinctive programming which would qualify both for the national ITV network and overseas sales. Within that model, there was a commitment to children's television drama both as a form and as a market strategy, and what emerged was a canon of controversial and occasionally terrifying children's fantasy dramas.

However, HTV had caused controversy even before it became an ITV company. Its unexpected entrance, as Harlech Television, into the lists of the 1968 franchise bids was met with outrage from the incumbent company, Television Wales and the West, who were subsequently beaten by Harlech's

³³⁷ David Davis 'Levy threat to ITA colour plans' *The Times* January 1st 1969, 20

³³⁸ By Our Political Editor '£1 rise in TV licence and cut in ITV levy' *The Times* Feb 16th 1971, 1

promises of star-studded broadcasts, featuring high-profile backers, Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor. Almost as soon as it assumed its role, though, HTV was beset with difficulties, not least of which was its dual franchise area covering the West of England and Wales. Following the precedent of TWW in broadcasting from Cardiff and Bristol, the company diversified into HTV Wales and HTV West. A move by the new company into drama was almost inevitable: not only was drama a popular draw, TWW had produced a dearth of it, according to *The Guardian*. In its report on Harlech's victory, it called their decision to produce drama 'encouraging, because TWW's last English language play was broadcast more than three years ago.'³³⁹ The move towards children's drama however was harder to fathom.

Despite the richness of the franchise area, TWW having, in 1967, made 'the biggest pre-tax profit per viewing home of any company in Britain – Granada, ATV and Rediffusion included,'³⁴⁰ Harlech was still a regional company with little access to the ITV national network. ITV regional companies tended not to produce children's television drama, let alone children's television fantasy. Children's drama was a 'high-risk genre', and fantasy drama required more production time and resources than straight adventure or realist drama.³⁴¹ The smaller regionals might produce locally-originated linking material, and several well-known personalities such as Gus Honeybun and Ozzie the Ostrich linger still in the popular memory, but they were less likely to produce children's drama as it was unlikely to get a network showing. Regionals such as Border and Ulster were, in fact, less likely to produce their own material in genres such as drama or light entertainment, and

³³⁹ Keith Harper 'Harlech's men dignified but coy' *The Guardian* June 16th 1967, 20

³⁴⁰ 'Miscellany' *The Guardian* April 11th 1967, 6

³⁴¹ Anna Home, interview with author, London, June 21st, 2013

would broadcast a largely networked schedule which would cost less and bring in higher audiences and advertising fees.

When HTV West won the franchise for Wales and the West in 1968, they departed from these orthodoxies, instead deliberately setting out to make competitive, internationally saleable children's drama productions which would also gain them access to the national network. In an interview with *TVZone* in 1993, Dromgoole declared HTV West had developed a deliberate strategy of producing children's drama for the purpose of getting onto the national network. However, access to the network was still guarded by the NCSC and consequently the dramas had to meet certain criteria of 'quality', popular appeal and distinctiveness specific to HTV West itself. It made sense to capitalise on HTV West's identity as a franchise area and production culture. HTV West's output for children therefore tended towards the historical (based upon the region's past, such as *The Pretenders*, *Smuggler*, and *Arthur of the Britons*), and the fantastic such as *The Georgian House* (1976), *Sky* (1975), *Children of the Stones* (1977), *King of the Castle* (1977), *The Clifton House Mystery* (1978), *Into the Labyrinth* (1981-82), some of which also adapted regional history as part of their narrative. The fantasy dramas of HTV West alternate between narratives constructed through primarily or wholly studio-shot, creating space through Chromakey, clever use of sets, and performance (*King of the Castle*, *The Georgian House*) and narratives more firmly situated in the franchise landscape through location filming (*Sky*, *Children of the Stones*). Consequently, the output was carefully placed to respond to the advantages and the economies of broadcasting as a small regional company, although Patrick Dromgoole was keen to point out that 'the production of children's programmes,

so far as regional companies were concerned, was allocated major resources – top staff and so on.’³⁴²

Offers from the regionals were obliged to be shown at least in part to the Network Children’s Subcommittee for assessment on quality. While the productions made under Dromgoole were often complex and clever, frequently riding the boundaries of controversial, he did not leave their network status to chance. Despite being Programme Controller for all HTV West, a not insignificant role and responsibility, Dromgoole was regularly attending Network Children’s Sub-Committee meetings from December 1969. Thereafter, Dromgoole, who was presumably also on several other ITA committees like the Regional Controllers Committee and Network Planning Committee, was an active and regular member of the Network Children’s Subcommittee. He engaged the Subcommittee frequently on behalf of HTV West: offering to take over research on children’s television,³⁴³ offers HTV Studios for meetings of ad hoc committees,³⁴⁴ and uses opportunities such as Subcommittee AGMs to show screen HTV productions for network approval.³⁴⁵ His operations within the Subcommittee were proactive and canny: when ITA representatives raised the recurring issue of gaps in the children’s drama schedules, Dromgoole offered to recut HTV West children’s dramas to fill the schedule.³⁴⁶ Despite this intensive activity in both production and promotion, HTV West did not actually have a children’s department. Producer Peter Graham-Scott noted this at the 1981 ITA Children’s Television Consultation, stating that there was instead ‘a simple upward structure and one simply

³⁴² ITA/IBA Archive Box 3995724 File 225/15 Children’s Consultation, Vol.1 *Children’s Programmes on Independent Television: A Report of an IBA Consultation Held in Cambridge, July, 1981* September 1981, 31

³⁴³ ITA/IBA Archive File 133/9/1: January 1972- 15 March 1978 NPC CSC Minutes, NCSC Minutes September 21st 1978

³⁴⁴ ITA/IBA Archive File 133/9/1: January 1972- 15 March 1978 NPC CSC Minutes, NCSC Minutes May 23rd 1973

³⁴⁵ ITA/IBA Archive File 133/9/1: January 1972- 15 March 1978 NPC CSC Minutes, AGM November 6th 1975, AGM November 25th 1976

³⁴⁶ ITA/IBA Archive File 133/9/1: January 1972- 15 March 1978 NPC CSC Minutes, NCSC Minutes May 19th 1977

talked to Patrick Dromgoole and that was it. It worked very well,' he added, 'you simply informed him what it was going to cost, and the money was either there or not.'³⁴⁷

In a retrospective about HTV West's *Sky*, the star Mark Harrison also situated the production culture at HTV West as linked, through Patrick Dromgoole and his ongoing career as a director, with contemporary theatre and drama. Similar to the use of theatrical conventions and stars under Cecil Madden's time as Head of BBC Children's, Harrison suggested that it was a combination of Dromgoole's personal connections and ambitions which created the production culture at HTV, situated around drama, quality and theatre: 'There were some very heavyweight actors that we got to play in [*Sky*]. They had an extraordinary collection of top-market luvvies who were also chums of Patrick Dromgoole's. I presume that's why they did it. And also because I think in essence it was good. The production values on this were so far superior to anything that had been on children's television.'³⁴⁸ One of these 'chums of Patrick Dromgoole' was Robert Eddison, a stage actor who played Sky's nemesis, Goodchild. Presumably another of Jack Watson who appeared in multiple HTV West children's dramas, including *Arthur of the Britons*, *The Georgian House*, *Into the Labyrinth* and *Sky*. The production culture at HTV West then can be seen as one of entrepreneurial politicking: contingent production of 'quality', controversial children's television to not only qualify it for the national network but to maximise audiences. In an NCSC meeting in 1977, Dromgoole advised the members of the Subcommittee that they should keep 'under constant regard the difference between realising the potential

³⁴⁷ ITA/IBA Archive Box 3995724 File 225/15 Children's Consultation, Vol.1 *Children's Programmes on Independent Television: A Report of an IBA Consultation Held in Cambridge, July, 1981* September 1981, 44

³⁴⁸ Jane Killick 'Mark Harrison: The Sky's the Limit' *TVZone* Special #21 May 1996, (15-18), 17

audience, and making programmes for the intended audience.’³⁴⁹

Consequently, HTV West children’s television programmes, and more particularly their fantasy dramas, set out to appeal to national and local viewers, as well as adults, children and more importantly the Authority. Where Anna Home stated that she wanted CTV to expand into the real world of 70s Britain, many of the HTV West programmes are attempting to come to terms with contemporary social, political and educational dynamics, anxieties which *The Georgian House* would interrogate as part of a specifically Bristolian drama.

‘*Look to Your Future*’: *The Georgian House* (HTV West, 1976)

The Georgian House was produced for the ITV children’s schedules by HTV West and transmitted in the after-school schedule in January and February 1976. Children’s television schedules were traditionally carved up between the ‘big five’ ITV majors who had the stranglehold on the national network; for a regional company to even produce children’s television was an economic gamble. HTV West, as half of franchise holder HTV which broadcast to Wales and the West of England from 1968 onwards, took a calculated risk in trying to get onto the national network with children’s drama. However, HTV West’s venture, carefully managed by their Managing Director, Patrick Dromgoole, paid off and by the late 1970s the company had built up a popular and critically acclaimed canon of children’s drama, much of it fantastic and not a little terrifying.

In *The Georgian House*, a museum in twentieth-century Bristol becomes the backdrop for a timeslip drama in which two modern teenagers are transported back to 1772. Middle-class

³⁴⁹ ITA/IBA Archive File 133/9/1: January 1972- 15 March 1978 NPC CSC Minutes, NCSC Minutes 19th May 1977

Dan and working-class Abbie are thrown back two hundred years to the newly-built Georgian house in which the Leadbetters, a merchant family involved in the Bristolian slave-trade, reside attended by their own slave, Ngo. The doubled space of the Georgian House as heritage site and home was modeled around the quotidian Bristol heritage site The Georgian House Museum, previously the residence of merchant, John Pinney, and his family. Whilst later lauded as one of the founding fathers of Bristol trade and society, Pinney built much of his fortune through the use and trade of slaves for his sugar plantations on the island of Nevis. *The Georgian House* drew on Pinney's business, family, and the 'other', lost history of their slave, Pero Jones, for its narrative. It functions as an adaptation, re-producing regional history to unsettle Bristol's identity, heritage and history and recover 'history from below' for black Britons, the working class and others excluded from the dominant discourse. In so doing, it also establishes another history that counters the popular historical dramas in which those dominant discourses were presented as unproblematic or reconcilable.

Both contemporary and historical time periods in *The Georgian House* were constructed in the naturalist mode; the timeslip itself was the sole nexus of the fantastic, constructed visually through electronic effects and narratively through Ngo's conviction in the ability of his cultural beliefs and artifacts to intercede in his fate. Shot entirely on videotape and in color, it was a studio-bound production, confined to the elaborate domestic and heritage spaces of the house itself, creating a sense of claustrophobia. While the use of videotape enabled Chromakey (colour separation overlay) and other electronic effects to be used in representing the fantastic appearances and disappearances of Abbie and Dan, it also created a textural stability between the textual past and present. Consequently, the

anxiety of *The Georgian House* was displaced not onto the unknown inherent in the fantastic but was instead located in the ideological difference between 1970s Britain and the Georgian era and the subsequent threat to all three adolescent protagonists. In this respect, it uncovers several 'other' histories and conflicting ideological models, as per Tess Cosslett's analysis of timeslips, creating a more politicized representation of pedagogy, capitalism and regional history than might otherwise be expected in a children's drama.³⁵⁰

The first of these conflicts is in Abbie and Dan's understanding of the Georgian era. Both are students of history who have been accepted to take part in an historical interpretation project within the Georgian House Museum. Dan's enthusiasm for the Age of Elegance, which 'is rather [his] thing', is based upon bourgeois society and its relationships, while Abbie's passion is for the relationship between labor and material culture, offering a potential working-class 'history from below'. She proposes using a flat-iron in a demonstration of Georgian household skills, much to resident custodian Ellis's disbelief, and waxes rhapsodic about the architecture and decor in the recreated drawing room: 'Incredible craftsmanship,' she says of a carriage clock. 'Imagine anyone taking such care today!' 'Or commissioning it,' Dan says. 'You'd have to be a Paul Getty.' 'Or a Tory Town Council,' says Abbie slyly, and Dan responds, 'Or a trades union'. The Georgian House thus sets up its contemporary narrative within a discourse of labor, class, and economy, a discourse complicated further by the timeslip to the Georgian era. The focus and accuracy of Abbie and Dan's historical knowledge, as well as their identity, is challenged when, post-timeslip, their social roles have been reversed: Abbie, originally from a council estate, becomes Miss Abigail

³⁵⁰ Tess Cosslett "'History from Below': Time-Slip Narratives and National Identity' in *The Lion and the Unicorn* Volume 26, Number 2, April 2002

Ventnor, the Leadbetters' cousin, and Dan, the public schoolboy, becomes her servant. Unaccustomed to the roles they must now play or the social and labor structures they may access, both must 'let go of mistaken stories or theories about the past' as 'the simple access to the past promised by the heritage site is problematized.'³⁵¹ Their understanding of the historical period through empiricism and the heritage space is challenged when they are made subject to and complicit in social, political and racial discourses antithetical to their twentieth-century beliefs.

Foremost among these is the right of the Leadbetters to own and dispose of Ngo as a possession. The slave trade then flourishing in Bristol is naturalized within *The Georgian House* as part of Bristol's civic identity and British nationality. Thomas Leadbetter, the patriarch of the house, declares that his involvement in the slave trade contributes to the prosperity not just of his house but of the nation as a whole: '[W]hy, the whole balance of our land would collapse were it not for men such as I.' His rhetoric establishes the slave trade as part of British and Bristolian history but goes further in presenting it as part of a systemic ideology of national and imperial power. Even socially progressive elements of Georgian society, such as the Leadbetters' guests Hezekiah Allsop and Madame Lavarre, are revealed to be invested in the status quo, returning Ngo to Leadbetter after he tries to escape with them.³⁵² The Georgian ideology is therefore not presented as glossy and unproblematic, as per many costume dramas, although its nostalgic connotations are reinforced as part of the twentieth-century heritage experience: Ellis tells Abbie, 'You just tell them that the Leadbetters were rich, and that the rich don't have any problems'. Nor is the narrative of slavery in Britain shown

³⁵¹ Cosslett "'History from Below": Time-Slip Narratives and National Identity' in *The Lion and the Unicorn* Volume 26, Number 2, April 2002, (243-253)

³⁵² Jill Laurimore & Harry Moore 'The Georgian House Script Episode 6' (Network DVD, 2010)

through an isolated and dramatic incident but as part of an axiomatic discourse. Racial, gender and class inequalities within historical British society are inherent at every level, and represented and reinforced through the domestic spaces of the Georgian House. Ngo and Dan are relegated to the kitchen, sleeping under the table and regularly threatened with violence. Abbie, as a relation of the Leadbetters, has her own bedroom, but as a young woman her movement and agency are constrained to the upper floors.

While Abbie is threatened with a return to Cornwall when she resists the Georgian ideology, Ngo faces more immediate and physical threats. Leadbetter intends to send him to Jamaica as a field slave, underlining Ngo's textual and historical status as a 'commodity form'. Once again, Abbie and Dan's knowledge and enthusiasm for the Georgian period is undermined: Abbie is made aware of the troubling history behind the 'beautiful things' she admired and the tyrannies of capitalism, and Dan is awakened to the oppression and marginalization inherent in 'elegant' society. Ngo, the most oppressed character, is even marginalized within the *mise-en-scène*, framed within sets and narrative in the same way as furniture: in several scenes, the white characters are foregrounded as they engage in dialogue whereas Ngo is visible but mute, static and out of focus in the rear of the shot. As part of this framework of race and objectification, Ngo is also used as a fetishized commodity. Not only do the Leadbetters outfit him in exoticized livery, reinforcing his status as part of the household furnishings, but in contemplating the loss of Ngo from the Leadbetter household to the dangerous labor of the plantation, their friend Lady Cecilia muses, '[T]hink what delicious fun you'll have looking for a new one.' While Abbie protests that Ngo is a human being, the ideology of the period including a naturalized view of race-based slavery is presented through trade, patriotism, family life,

gender roles and domestic spaces 'as 'the "social cement", in Gramsci's terms, whereby the power of dominant groups is maintained without regular and widespread recourse to physical coercion.'³⁵³

Race and its treatment within British society is the key paradigm shift for *The Georgian House*; correspondingly, Ngo is more than a cipher or a victim. The production makes him the locus for values of individualism, multiculturalism and national identity but it avoids the trap of making the white characters his saviours. The timeslip that transports Abbie and Dan to the past is generated by a carving belonging to Ngo, which, although later appropriated by Leadbetter, reflects the power and resistance of a subaltern subject through culture, history and voice. He emancipates himself through his own agency and intelligence, and his collaboration with Abbie and Dan. In a decade when Race Relations Acts were breaking down colour bars in labour and society, this seems a valuable reflection of changing attitudes to race, class and British identity, despite the ongoing popularity of more problematic programs such as *Love Thy Neighbor* (ITV, 1972-76), *The Black and White Minstrel Show* (BBC, 1958-78) and *It Ain't Half Hot, Mum* (BBC, 1974-81). However, *The Georgian House* does not merely reflect contemporary changes in British society but attempts to recover a black experience of the slave trade, an 'other' history obscured until recently in cities like Bristol and Liverpool. The Mansfield Judgment acts as the narrative and temporal pivot of *The Georgian House*: its enactment on 22nd June 1772 guaranteed the freedom of slaves in Britain and therefore effectively ended the slave trade as a profitable enterprise. It also made those disenfranchised slaves British citizens, but, as Ngo comments, the freed slaves 'are desperate, so they betray each other. [...] They have no money, no work, no hope. I do not know why

³⁵³ McArthur *Television and History*, 1

they decided to free us without making any provisions for our wellbeing.’

Ngo is as much a part of this discourse of British identity, integration and citizenship as Abbie and Dan. The final episode uses historical documents to resolve Ngo's fate. A regional newspaper reveals that, in 1816, ‘Mr Ngo Aboyah, the wealthy timber merchant of Sierra Leone and co-founder of the new city of Freetown, was welcomed by the Bristol Society of Merchant Venturers following his arrival in our city.’ It adds that Ngo intended to ‘endow a fine charitable institution for the housing and education of former slaves and their descendants,’ affecting civic history, spaces and identity and indicating the contribution of black Britons to contemporary and historical Britain. This ending suggests that British national identity and citizenship is constituted through contemporaneous British values of multiculturalism, civic engagement and personal identification and contribution to the nation-state, but it also introduces new methodologies of historical interpretation. The Georgian House exposes tensions within historiography by contrasting easy concepts of nostalgia and aestheticism with the hierarchized oppression through race, class and gender which produced the material culture and national identity, an approach which also reflected contemporaneous shifts in the teaching of history within national education.

The British Schools’ Council was influential in the debate about the purpose of British education in the 1970s, and in the subsequent implementation of changes in curriculum: in 1976, it published *A New Look at History*, a project originating in the concerns of ‘teachers of history [...] obliged by the current waves of curriculum reform to question the purpose and method of history in the classroom’.³⁵⁴ First initiated in 1972, it sought to justify the place of history within the educational curriculum,

³⁵⁴ British Schools Council *A New Look at History*, 2

how adolescents between 13 and 16 could most productively approach and synthesize history, and which teaching modes would best facilitate this. It proposed new approaches to teaching history, such as Marxist history, the use of historical documents and the invocation of lived experience to encourage a more holistic approach to historical study. *The Georgian House* reflects these concerns and approaches in its construction of education and history by incorporating quotidian historical events and documents such as Felix Farley's *Bristol Journal*, a historical regional newspaper, to reveal not only narrative but the mechanics and glossing of ideology which worked to brutalize and repress its characters. Likewise, the production's representation of 'lived experience' and its spatial and social restrictions, inequalities and naturalization, throws into relief the complex interaction of heritage, nostalgia and social responsibility. The 'dominant ideology,' as described by McArthur, which 'refines itself out of existence, the dominant practices in social institutions and groups becoming naturalized,' was unearthed and questioned by *The Georgian House*, not just for the Georgian period but for the 1970s as well.³⁵⁵

When Ngo manages to timeslip to the future, he rejects the 1970s' ideology and spaces as Abbie and Dan rejected those of the Georgian era, describing contemporary Bristol as 'a hell' with its noise, pollution and 'madness'. Ngo's discontent with the present, and an ending in which Dan and Abbie are dismissed from the Museum by Ellis for their attempts to change the past, suggests that while racial, gender and class politics had improved in two centuries, they remained far from utopian. *The Georgian House*'s refusal to valorize either past, present or future, along with its representation of 'other' histories, may be attributed to changing conceptions of race,

³⁵⁵ McArthur *Television and History*, 7

history and education in the 1970s. Similarly, its articulation of race and nationality was located through the changing conceptions of Britain in the wake of the 1948 arrival of MV Empire Windrush which carried the first large-scale immigration from Jamaica; a Britain in which multiculturalism was not a set of values quickly or easily arrived at but an uneasy and ongoing negotiation, organized through politics and media as much as through social relationships. Bristol was not immune from these tensions: an influential boycott of Bristol buses in 1963 was organized to protest the bus companies' employment color bar, and the Bristol riots of 1980 were linked to increasing racial tensions within the city throughout the 1970s. Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace suggests that such 'political tensions between the city's black and white populations ought to be traced to a missing history of slavery'.³⁵⁶

Twenty years before the formation of the Bristol Slave Trade Action Group and subsequent acknowledgements of Bristol's role in the Atlantic slave trade, then, The Georgian House attempted to recover, at least in part, this missing history and 'other' histories from below, incorporating and transmitting new pedagogies and new British values and identities.

Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, although fantasy was becoming a popular mode and aesthetic within British children's television in the 1970s, it was being used to address different imperatives across the regulated duopoly. HTV West was using it to construct what might also be seen as a local genre, in a more literal sense than Barbara Klinger uses it. Fantasy became a lens through which to view their franchise area, its history and its

³⁵⁶ Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace *The British Slave Trade and Public Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 26

broadcasting requirements. It also became a specifically independent television mode, which HTV West used to represent their company on the national network and their audience. Through fantasy texts such as *King of the Castle*, which like *The Georgian House* used fantasy to interrogate social and educational changes and children's democratic values in the 1970s, HTV West produced 'people's television' for working class viewers. It might not have been a quiz show but it did interrogate the class system in a way the BBC would never have done. Similarly, in *The Georgian House*'s questioning of the slave trade in Bristol, the history and anxieties of contemporary Bristolians, across class, race and gender, were uncovered. The BBC were nevertheless engaging with contemporary anxieties; as Wright suggests of *The Changes*' approach to multiculturalism and race relations. The BBC's structural stability and assurance of transmission created an aesthetic that could afford to be more nuanced and was more specifically oriented towards the public service values of literariness and art which produced *A Traveller in Time*, whereas ITV responded to no less vital PSB values of authenticity and reflexivity within the framework of independent television. This is not to suggest that these motives were purely philanthropic: HTV West produced *The Georgian House* as part of a production culture which deliberately complicated children's and youth audiences in order to maximise audiences, sales and network access, and the BBC was still operating from a centralised and middle-class position. Yet both used fantasy to deliver an institutionally inflected perspective of public service values, contemporary anxieties and children's moral and emotional needs.

Chapter Five: Radicalism and Retail: Children's Fantasy Drama, 1980-1990

Between 1980 and 1990, the political, economic and cultural landscape of Britain changed drastically, and the media landscape was not left unscathed. Tracey even describes the 1980s as 'the Passchendaele of public broadcasters.'³⁵⁷ Much of this was attributable to the policies endorsed by the Conservative government under Thatcher which was in power between 1979 and 1990, and the subsequent Conservative government which persisted for another seven years after Thatcher's resignation. During the period of Thatcher's premiership, Patricia Holland suggests, 'legislation and economic organisation moved away from public provision and public responsibility towards individual choice and individual responsibility; away from public ownership and the concept of public service, to private ownership and the promotion of finance.'³⁵⁸

In the early 1980s, the Conservative government had been instrumental in the creation of the new and potentially radical broadcaster Channel 4 but, in the wake of the 1983 election, free market politics were increasingly brought to bear upon British broadcasting and telecommunications as a whole. As a result, legislation was enacted to develop cable and satellite broadcasting in 1984, and following the BBC's withdrawal from the cable and satellite race for economic reasons, 'policy towards satellite broadcasting in the UK was effectively focused exclusively on commercial considerations' Goodwin 47. Further moves to forcibly shift British broadcasting to a more competitive model through changes to the constitution and funding of the BBC management, the introduction of an

³⁵⁷ Michael Tracey *The Decline and Fall of Public Service Broadcasting*, 192

³⁵⁸ Patricia Holland *Broadcasting and the NHS in the 1980s*, 7

independent production quota, and the (eventually fulfilled) threat of ITV companies being sold to the highest bidder in the 1990 'franchise auction' all contributed to a media landscape in which productions had to be considered as commodities as much as cultural artefacts. Simultaneously, the increasing public discursivity of children's television and the way in which it came to dominate the public discourse about broadcasting, as Davies establishes, meant that children's television itself moved from concern with politics to a politicised model. Children's television from 1988 became an emblem of the tensions of the high wire act of public service broadcasting in an increasingly commercial Britain.

Inevitably, fantasy drama, so prevalent in the 1970s, was affected by these industrial and cultural reforms. This chapter analyses the effects upon the production, site and style of fantasy drama in a decade when the nature of broadcasting, society and childhood was in flux. However, children's fantasy still offered opportunity for radicalism, within and outside the framework of commerce.

BBC Children's, 1980-86

Monica Sims, the Head of Children's Programmes credited by Home as facilitating a 'golden age of children's television', departed the department to return to radio in 1978. When Sims departed to become Controller of Radio 4, Edward Barnes was promoted from Assistant Head of Children's Programmes to Head with effect from 1st December. Barnes was best-known for being, alongside Biddy Baxter, one of the architects of the Department's most enduring and successful programme, *Blue Peter*.

By 1980, Edward Barnes had been in post as Head of BBC Children's for two years, having previously been assistant head

for eight years. From the outset, his approach had been one of consolidation of the ‘Great Tradition’ established under Monica Sims’ administration, as he stated to the press. Upon his ascension, he told *Television Today*, ‘I am totally committed to what Monica did. And that means a comprehensive set of programmes made to suit the needs of our particular audience.’³⁵⁹ In another interview, he stated, ‘The great task at the moment [...] is not how much to change but to keep up the standard already set in what is one of the most talented and flourishing departments in BBC television.’³⁶⁰ Barnes, from the outset of his administration, was declaring his intention to consolidate the tradition set up by Sims before him, rather than changing the balance and content of the schedule.

However, by 1980, there had already been marked shifts in the schedules and production culture. Drama production had decreased dramatically, and the drop in fantasy drama had been even starker. Instead, in what drama was being made, preference was given to realist dramas, such as *Break in the Sun*, and historical dramas like *The Machinegunners*. These followed on from output under Sims in terms of spatial use and aesthetic: many of the dramas produced under Barnes were filmed on location either on film or on video via Outside Broadcast, thus reflecting the move away from the studio begun under Sims but also indexing the developments in technology that allowed greater mobility, expansive dramatic spaces, and altered aesthetics for the 1980s. However, the balance of the schedule had shifted away from mimetic/fantasy towards contemporary/historical. The few fantasy dramas produced under Barnes gesture towards the industrial and institutional pressures that would come to dominate the 1980s, and would affect the production of the fantastic under Barnes.

³⁵⁹ ‘Now Monica is gone - What is the BBC offering children this autumn?’ *The Stage* September 13th 1979, 19

³⁶⁰ ‘Barnes succeeds Sims’ *The Stage* October 5th 1978, 19

Barnes was facing an onslaught of challenges in the early 1980s, not least of which were a series of BBC cuts in response to what Tracey describes as the ‘radical atmosphere spawned by the Conservative government of Mrs Thatcher’³⁶¹ and, by corollary, the looming threat of cable and satellite, being advanced as part of a free market model of telecommunications by the Conservative government. Thus, it made sense to economise on drama production, traditionally one of the most expensive elements of children’s television. Fantasy drama as the expansive and costly genre it tended to be in BBC Children’s was an obvious triage point. However, as had occurred under Lingstrom, fantasy did not disappear altogether but was rather re-modulated to correspond to a particular conception both of the child audience and how BBC Children’s could best cater for it. Barnes had declared himself to be a paternalist in a *Listener* article, unambiguously titled, ‘Why I am a Paternalist’.³⁶² It is perhaps unsurprising therefore that one of the few instances of the fantastic in drama during his tenure had a distinctly educative and civic bent to it.

Captain Zep: Space Detective was an interactive drama broadcast between 1983 and 1984, which used performance, audience interaction, animation and Colour Separation Overlay to create a narrative about the titular hero, a space detective who travels the stars in his spaceship solving intergalactic crime. In press reports, Barnes singled out *Captain Zep* particularly as potentially heralding a new aesthetic and format for the future: ‘One of the most positive elements of *Captain Zep* is that it has pointed the way to different kinds of format we might develop.’³⁶³ In some respects, this is true enough. The influence of *Captain Zep* can be seen in later programmes such as

³⁶¹ Michael Tracey *The Decline and Fall of Public Service Broadcasting*, 108

³⁶² George Barnes ‘Why I am a Paternalist’ *The Listener* November 4th 1982, 13

³⁶³ ‘Sixty years and looking to do even better’ *The Stage* February 10th 1983, 14

Knightmare (ITV, 1987-1994), *Time Busters* (BBC, 1993-95), the *Raven* series (BBC, 2002-2010), and *Trapped!* (BBC, 2007-2010), popular fantastic game-shows which required an element of participatory narrative and generic hybridity. Where *Captain Zep* brought the child audience into the studio and involved them as both audience and agents within the story by positioning them as trainee 'space detectives' in the SOLVE Academy, facilitating this through costuming the audience in futuristic uniforms and through the interaction of the audience with the actors, these later series would also place children within fantastic spaces as part of a game show, through participation, costume and setting, and perhaps more crucially viewing practices. In *Captain Zep*, the perspective of the child audience as both viewer and participant was mediated by visual framing, such as screened video file 'evidence'.

However, this was one of the few weekday examples of fantasy drama, however hybridised, which remained in Barnes' schedules. The fantasy drama produced under his administration after 1980 changed drastically in terms of production culture, style and scheduling. This may have been as a result of Barnes' own generic predilections and his understanding of the child audience. However, it was as likely to be a strategic response to the changing fortunes of the Corporation from 1977 onwards, when 'the BBC faced the daunting problem of the renewal of its royal charter, the need for a licence fee increase, and the implications of government economic policies.'³⁶⁴ By early 1980, the BBC as a whole was suffering financial uncertainty. It therefore made sense for a Children's Programmes department to consider ways to make home-originated, live-action drama, one of the most expensive genres, cheaper. As a result, some genres, forms and schedules became more appealing and others less so. Fantasy drama disappeared from the weekday schedules

³⁶⁴ Michael Tracey *The Decline and Fall of Public Service Broadcasting*, 105

almost entirely but started to develop in the later years of Barnes' tenure, as high-value, prestigious fantasy dramas. *The Box of Delights* and *The Children of Green Knowe* were produced and promoted as feasts, both visually and financially. *The Times* revealed in an interview with Barnes in 1984 that '[h]is decision, for example, to "go nap" on a six-part serialization of Masefield's *Box of Delights* meant that he spent one twelfth of his [annual £12m] budget at one fell swoop.' Barnes continued, "'I desperately wanted to make it and though there were many other calls on the budget, I have to back my professional judgement and my instinct – and those of others whose opinions I trust – in making a final decision.'"³⁶⁵

However, this final decision did impact upon the rest of the drama output for children in 1984, if not in perpetuity, as McGown suggests:

Edward Barnes's comment to the press that [*The Box of Delights*] would be a feast among the balanced diet of children's television demands scrutiny of the 1984 schedules leading up to *The Box of Delights*' screening at the end of the year. This reveals a meagre ration of drama in particular, a famine before the feast as funds were sequestrated and funnelled into production of *The Box of Delights*. Repeats of *The Monkees* featured heavily, for example, and the number of European imports seemed at its highest since the late 60s.³⁶⁶

Thus, *The Box of Delights* becomes for children's television a prime example of what Johnson identifies as an institutional conception of telefantasy, foregrounding the institutional proficiency with technological advances that made it possible: 'the disruption of socio-cultural and generic verisimilitude

³⁶⁵ Judy Froshaug 'Family Life' *The Times* November 10th 1984, 18

³⁶⁶ McGown and Docherty *The Hill and Beyond*, 138

implied in the representation of the fantastic is understood to offer the opportunity to experiment with the formal possibilities of television as a medium.³⁶⁷ But it came at the price of weekday drama, fantastic or otherwise. Consequently, throughout Barnes' time as head of department children's fantasy drama becomes part of an institutional and cultural discourse which locates the fantastic more as part of the televisual spectacular in visual style and scheduling than as part of the everyday. Where previously there had been holiday programming that foregrounded the fantastic as part of a production strategy, such as drama serials, pantomimes, a tradition which carries on from the 1950s to the present day, and 50 minute holiday 'specials', ranging from 'the imaginative leaps of Roald Dahl (*James and the Giant Peach*) to contemporary musicals such as *Orion* and *Ain't Many Angels* (Howard and Blake)' this was generally balanced by the presence of the fantastic in the after-school schedules with serials such as *The Changes*, *Lizzie Dripping*, and others. However, this schedule balance shifted under Barnes' administration and fantasy became rearticulated less as a common good and more a festive treat.

BBC Children's, 1986-1990

In 1986, Edward Barnes took early retirement and the position of Head of the Children's Programmes department became vacant. It was not an auspicious time for a new head of department to take the reins. From BBC documents, it appears that Barnes had been considering retirement from 1984 and had delayed it 'not only because the pension figure was too small but also because [...] in view of all the changes that have occurred since February 1st [...] that this was a bad time to

³⁶⁷ Johnson *Telefantasy*, 147

change the head of children's programmes.'³⁶⁸ Presumably this was in reference to the changes that were ongoing within the wider media landscape. The debate over the Cable and Broadcast Bill had been rumbling onwards, following the Hunt Report of 1983, and was finalised in the Cable and Broadcasting Bill of December 1984, and the BBC was increasingly coming under scrutiny from the Government with regards to its public service mission and public funding. The Adam Smith Institute, closely affiliated with the Conservative Party, produced its Omega Report on Communication Policy in 1984, which militated against the funding of the BBC by licence fee, and, as Patricia Holland neatly summarises, 'argued that it was an inappropriate and unpopular tax and its workings were not transparent.' The report suggested that the licence fee 'should be reduced and the BBC forced to make up its funding with advertising.'³⁶⁹ Holland herself argues that this led to the BBC facing 'a central dilemma: if it did not appeal to a broad audience the licence fee would not be justified. If, on the other hand, it gave too much priority to 'popular' programmes it could be accused of abandoning public service principles [...]'³⁷⁰. Thus, per Holland's suggestion, BBC production strategy and branding was in no small part being affected by external influences. By March 1986 these concerns had not dispersed; they had, if anything, intensified. However, they had either been resolved to Barnes' satisfaction or were no longer so pressing and his early retirement was announced to the press.³⁷¹

The following month, it was revealed that Anna Home, then Head of Children's and Young People's Programmes at ITV franchise TVS, would take up the post of BBC Head of Department with effect from the beginning of June 1986. Home

³⁶⁸ BBC WAC B213-002 'Our routine: 13/08/84' H.C.P.Tel. to M.D.Tel. August 16th 1984

³⁶⁹ Patricia Holland *Broadcasting and the NHS in the 1980s*, 126

³⁷⁰ *Ibid*

³⁷¹ 'BBC to lose its head of Children's' *The Stage* March 20th 1986, 16

had joined the Children's department in 1964 as a production assistant on Play School and had by 1975 become the Executive Head of all children's drama at the BBC. During that period, she had been a significant force in rebuilding the capacity to produce drama after it was redistributed to adult departments in 1963 (see BBC Children's: 1950-1964). Collaborating with other producers within the Children's department to reclaim the money and the precedent to make drama for children, Home produced the first wholly dramatised production, *Joe and the Gladiator*, on location in Newcastle and South Shields, 'on a shoestring and with a non-Drama crew'.³⁷² She went on to produce and orchestrate a comprehensive drama output and philosophy for children, including *Mandog*, *Carrie's War*, *The Changes* and *The Moon Stallion*, among others. The drama output under her Executive administration was exceptionally strong on adaptations and fantasy, and was frequently organised around collaboration with children's authors, based largely upon Home's own stated interest in children's literature.

Upon her return, as with Barnes' accession, Home's own emphasis was very much on 'maintaining the high standards and traditions of children's BBC'. However, Managing Director Bill Cotton's (1984-1988) words of welcome to the prodigal also indicated the contemporary pressures upon the BBC: 'Under her direction, I am sure that our children's programmes will maintain their worldwide reputation.'³⁷³

The high standards and traditions of children's BBC were required to be played out on an increasingly visible, contested and global platform. This dual mission came at the same time as the BBC itself was undergoing a sustained interrogation by the government and media about its public service remit, purpose and funding. In 1986, the Peacock Committee had been

³⁷² Anna Home, interview with author, London, June 21st, 2013

³⁷³ 'Home rejoins the BBC as head of children's' *The Stage* April 17th 1986, 19

appointed to investigate the funding, efficiency and public value of the BBC, whose political attitudes and publicly funded structure were antithetical to the Thatcher government. Patricia Holland et al even suggest that 'the concept of "public service" continued to provoke anger, as well as embarrassment for the Conservative government.'³⁷⁴ The Peacock Committee investigation was emblematic of this anger and embarrassment, and a month after Home took up the reins at the department the Peacock Committee Report was published. The Committee may have eventually 'rejected the proposition that the BBC should take advertising' advocated in the Omega Report and by Government ministers, including the Prime Minister, but they 'instead proposed a vision of broadcasting in which consumers and producers would engage indirect transactions for programmes'.³⁷⁵ It suggested that in the light of the broadcasting changes heralded by the Cable and Broadcasting Bill (1984) public service broadcasting instead of being the spine of British broadcasting would and should be just one choice of media 'from as many alternative sources of supply as possible'.³⁷⁶ More immediately significant to the production of children's drama was the Committee's suggestion that a 25% production quota from independent producers should be implemented at both the BBC and ITV companies, a proposal taken up enthusiastically by the Government as early as November 1986 and endorsed in the 1988 White Paper on Broadcasting. Public service values were becoming an albatross for British broadcasters. Yet for the BBC to veer too far in the opposite direction ran the risk of being accused of competing with ITV, as Holland notes.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁴ Holland *Broadcasting and the NHS in the 1980s*, 120

³⁷⁵ Tom O'Malley and Janet Jones 'Introduction' in *The Peacock Committee and UK Broadcasting Policy* ed. Tom O'Malley and Janet Jones (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 6

³⁷⁶ Alan Peacock *Report of the Committee on Financing the BBC* (London: Stationery Office Books, 1986)

³⁷⁷ Patricia Holland *Broadcasting and the NHS*, 126

Home therefore assumed control of BBC Children's at a moment when the department's ethos of inclusion, citizenship and child-centred television was long-established and internationally recognised, and was moreover one to which she had directly contributed. But the landscape both of the BBC and the British media as a whole was undergoing seismic changes in response to new technology and new concepts of public service broadcasting. Negotiating the sharper shoals of production, public service and the market would require the acuity of a Machiavelli and years of experience; fortunately, Anna Home had both. This experience in drama production and awareness of the economics of children's television in public service broadcasting across the regulated duopoly, I argue, allowed Home to continue and expand drama production for children as part of a public service and profit-driven model.

In November 1988, a report in *The Times Literary Supplement* announced that the 'National Trust has been commissioning from prominent children's authors a series of (instant) classics, with plots centred on some of its more prominent properties.' Helen Cresswell had produced *Moondial*, 'a very interesting time-travelling tale based on Belton House, Lincolnshire, which made considerable use of the house and the gardens for the development of its plot.' In the same year, BBC Children's Cresswell adapted it for the weekday schedules. A review of the television production by *The Stage* stated, 'By courtesy of the National Trust, *Moondial*'s focal scenes have been shot in and around Belton House, and this, presumably, is going to lead to some quality filming.'³⁷⁸ Quality was a touchstone in the late 1980s, in the face of the Conservative government's plans to marketise public service broadcasting, and, as Buckingham declares, "'quality" sells – at least if it is traditionally defined. As in television in general, the most easily exportable material

³⁷⁸ Ann Nugent 'Moondial' *The Stage* February 18th 1988, 25

is that which comes closest to the national stereotype: literary adaptations about middle-class white children having exciting adventures, preferably in rural and historic settings [...] all do extremely well in overseas markets.³⁷⁹ From 1969, the National Trust had been engaged upon a fifteen year plan to maximise their membership and their public profile. The use of Belton as a television location, not only in *Moondial* but in the same year as Chesney Wold in a BBC adaptation of *Bleak House*, would benefit both the Trust and the BBC Children's department, for whom the heritage location and historical time shifts would indicate both quality and fantasy.

The Children's department under Home also quickly and publicly embraced the BBC initiatives of the late 1980s in order to keep drama production viable. Not only was the move to the regions a key part of children's production strategy from 1987 onwards, Home was also vocal about the need to fulfil the independent quota in pace from 1986 and how the quota could be achieved. *The Stage* reported on Home's response to both imperatives, a regional initiative that saw 'a bumper £1 million children's programme package to be launched at its new Liverpool docklands studios [...] in line with the corporation's policy of moving London Programmes out of the capital' and her intention that Children's should be 'the largest commissioners of independents in the first year.'³⁸⁰ The other key region during this period was the North East.

The Watch House, made in the North East and broadcast in 1988, used fantasy to incorporate local culture and history into a drama about heritage, family and social responsibility. Similar in many respects to *Moondial*, *The Watch House* featured a young girl, isolated in a strange area and abandoned to the care of strangers, haunted by the history and historical characters of

³⁷⁹ Buckingham *Children's Television in Britain*, 72

³⁸⁰ 'Liverpool kids' treat' *The Stage* December 23rd 1987, 13

the coastal town in which she is staying. However, *The Watch House* was not located in a stately home but a community and a regional landscape, relationships reinforced by the drama's location around a community-run museum of local history. Like *Moondial*, *The Watch House* was produced as part of a symbiotic relationship, which could release funds, expand the drama output and also represent children's television as part of a cultural discourse.

Despite Home's established history and position within the BBC Children's department, she had departed for new ITV franchise, TVS, in Jan 1982, as Head of the Children's and Young People's department, after having been instrumental in the company's successful franchise bid in 1981. Upon her return in 1986, therefore, Home was the first Head of BBC Children's to have worked in positions of authority for both the BBC and ITV and was well-acquainted with the production policies, processes and ecologies of both, having been instrumental in producing and controlling children's television for both broadcasters. She returned from TVS to assume control of the department during a period of severe disruption and threat to the BBC, equipped with an involved knowledge of the BBC and its commercial competitors with which to negotiate the changing face of the BBC and therefore the changing practices and principles of BBC children's programming. Home's employment across the regulated duopoly would significantly influence BBC children's television from her appointment in 1986 until her retirement in 1996, elaborating upon and sustaining what Jay Blumler would call 'the Great Tradition' of children's television but underpinned, and even funded, by a canny and covert approach to marketisation and popular formats of programming. Under Home, merchandising and market research became valuable stealth factors in sustaining children's television and particularly drama throughout a period during which it was under pressure

departmentally, institutionally and politically. As Buckingham et al point out, like Jocelyn Hay of the VLV, Home rejected 'the notion that advertising in children's television should be banned. [...] on the grounds that this would result in a dramatic reduction in budgets'. Hay was also cited as acknowledging 'that "controlled exploitation" in the form of merchandising is also a necessary support for programme-making.'³⁸¹ That Home clearly shared Hay's attitude to sustaining British children's television by deploying both public service and private sector mechanisms is made evident in a BBC memo in which she admits that, although not widely known for obvious reasons, 'the BBC takes a percentage of the merchandising revenue from series like *Thundercats*'.³⁸² The influence and importance of merchandising and series such as this is explored later in this chapter, but it was not just Children's Programmes but the BBC as a whole which was investigating and cultivating its place within the market. Consequently, fantasy drama became more than part of an often overlooked schedule, it became part of a broader discourse located around the continuing existence of the BBC through increased visibility of public value, popular appeal, and profit, emblematised in the fantasy spectacular of *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

The Chronicles of Narnia

Despite all of the external and institutional pressures facing her upon her return, Home did not seem to be disheartened, choosing to invest heavily in an adaptation of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, a production which she describes as her present from the BBC, to be transmitted in the lead-up to the Christmas period in 1987. The BBC's acquisition of exclusive

³⁸¹ Buckingham et al *Children's Television in Britain*, 52

³⁸² BBC WAC B213-002 Children's Programmes General Part 1 'Acquired/Commissioned Children's Programmes: Merchandising Rights' H.C.P.Tel. to James Arnold Baker, October 14th 1987

rights to the Chronicles was declared in December 1986, several months after Home's accession. That this was one of her major initial productions should have surprised no one. Anna Home's previous stint as producer and then executive producer of BBC children's drama, and as Head of Children's and Young People's Programming at TVS, had been characterised by notable adaptations of children's classics and by television fantasy drama. However, the choice of C.S. Lewis' series was also astute politically and economically.

At a time when the Conservative government was demanding that the BBC be more commercial whilst also maintaining public service broadcasting standards and positioning itself as a global producer, a glossy, technologically advanced children's programme for the holiday season and redolent with what Peirse calls 'retro-fit Britishness'³⁸³ could launch Home's administration with a Christmas cracker-like bang. It also allowed the BBC Children's Department to reclaim the Sunday serial slot which had been lost twenty-five years earlier. It is, of course, notable that once again the glossy television fantasy drama had been located around the holiday period, thereby not only situating its economic investment for the best possible viewing return during the winter schedule but also carefully negotiating it as a child-centred production but with family appeal. It therefore sustained the practice orchestrated under Barnes of the children's fantasy drama as specialised through spectacle and schedule. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was not only anchored to the holiday period of 1988 by scheduling but also by the narrative: the fimbulwinter of Narnia where it was 'always winter and never Christmas' was contraindicated by the diegetic appearance of Father Christmas to give gifts to the Pevensies. However, it also indicated Home's

³⁸³ Alison Peirse 'A broken tradition: British telefantasy and children's television in the 1980s and 1990s' in *Visual Culture in Britain* 11, no. 1 2010: (109-124) 112

aspirations: the *Chronicles of Narnia* production was intended as a long-term investment and programming strand of '18 half hour episodes based on the seven Narnia novels' with 'six episodes being produced every year from 1988.'³⁸⁴

It was a production that had been a long time coming. By Home's own account, the BBC had been 'trying to get the rights for years and years' since before she left for ITV. When an agreement was finally reached, Home 'went to Michael Grade and said, "We have got the rights to Narnia. You're going to have to finance it," because there was no way that we could do it on the kind of budgets that we had. He was fantastic. I remember sitting in his office and he picked up the phone to BBC Enterprises and said, "Anna's got the rights to Narnia and you're going to put some money, a lot of money, in." And they did.'³⁸⁵ There was a certain amount of good fortune involved with Home's achievement. Not only had the legal tangle surrounding the rights unsnarled after years of argument, Grade, as BBC Director of Programmes, also threw his not inconsiderable weight behind it. The timing was propitious: as a valuable co-production, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* could potentially be appropriated as evidence that the BBC were showing willing on the independent production front. But other political manoeuvring would be equally as important to the timely funding of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Grade's time at the BBC had been brief and stormy, and by November 1987, he had departed the BBC for Channel 4, just three years after he had assumed his post.³⁸⁶ Home had arrived in June 1986 and managed to buttonhole Grade before he was replaced by a successor who might not have been so supportive.

³⁸⁴ 'The BBC in Nania (sic) ' *The Stage* December 11th 1986, 19

³⁸⁵ Anna Home, interview with author, London, June 21st, 2013

³⁸⁶ Peter Fiddick 'Glee at Channel 4 as Grade moves in' *The Guardian* November 18th 1987, 1

In addition, with the 'Great Tradition' being foregrounded in and as part of the increasing commercialisation of children's television, children's television itself was becoming far more visible both institutionally and politically. BBC Enterprises, so integral to getting Narnia produced, were becoming increasingly involved across the board in the Corporation's production ecology. This was nowhere more true than in Children's programming. The production of *The Box of Delights* had been actively hampered by the involvement of Enterprises, when co-producers, Lella, became suspicious about Enterprises' vacillation over funding and had drastically reduced their own funding offer, much to Edward Barnes' dismay. Undaunted by this set back, Enterprises continued to invest in children's programming, particularly drama. Created as a limited liability company in 1979 from the merging of several departments, Enterprises was intended to maximise revenue for the BBC as licence fee revenue dropped and was then limited by the Conservative Government of the 1980s. Their involvement in BBC production as well as policy shaped the output throughout the 1980s. Minutes of a meeting between Enterprises and Children's in 1987, one year after Home had returned to the BBC, stated that the 'two areas of programming which the majority of Enterprises' sales division can successfully exploit are animation and quality drama. 'Classic drama,' the Enterprises summary goes on, 'such as Dickens or "quality" children's novels would still appeal to Television Sales, but would also generate greater potential for Video.'³⁸⁷

This, then, was a new era of children's television, an accomplishment which Barnes had worked towards but not worked through, and it called for a new visual style. Where Barnes had used another children's fantasy classic, John

³⁸⁷ BBC WAC B213-002: Children's Programmes General Part 1 'BBC Television Children's Programmes and their Exploitation by BBC Enterprises', undated

Masefield's *The Box of Delights*, as a 'sparkling' Christmas co-production with Lella, so too would Home with *The Chronicles of Narnia*, beginning with *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, in co-production with American company, Wonderworks. Both were ideologically nostalgic, technologically advanced, hybridised fantasy dramas, with a high degree of showmanship in the production and publicity, reminiscent in some ways of Cecil Madden's early fantasy dramas for the BBC. Both also ostensibly effectively countered the capitalist, modern ethos of the 1980s by invoking a pre-war childhood and children's media but then turned round and marketed that protected childhood aggressively.

This new interrelationship of public service and profitability lent itself to the production of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* not only its co-production status but in its visual style, a style so seminal that BBC production staff involved have suggested that the later motion picture adaptations were inspired by it. Much of the contemporary promotion focused upon the technology used to develop the special effects and aesthetics of Narnia, including magical creatures, spells, and Aslan himself. While Aslan was created through up to the minute animatronics, other effects were created via a hybridised aesthetic approach similar to that used in *The Box of Delights*. Colour Separation Overlay, cel animation and live action were all combined to create the fabric of Narnia itself. The live action was constructed in large part on location, using the Cairngorm Mountains and Manivere Castle as key sites for extended shooting. However, one key scene was in fact studio-bound and distinctly theatrical: Peter Pevensie's fight with the wolf Maugrim, a live-action performer in prosthetics and bodysuit. The material shot on video and on location was mixed into Colour Separation Overlay studio filming so that while it appeared that the fight was still occurring within the *mise-en-*

scene of Aslan's camp, the combatants were also spatially and aesthetically isolated. In addition, this approach meant that a red filter could be applied over the scenes, inflecting and containing any violence. Later instalment, *The Silver Chair*, used significantly more location shooting as the protagonists travelled across Narnia but used studio space by necessity to create the disparity in scope needed for the representation of a Giants' Castle.

However the texture and aesthetic of the *Chronicles* shifts significantly from *The Lion Witch and the Wardrobe*, directed by Marilyn Fox, to the following three, *Prince Caspian*, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, and *The Silver Chair*, directed by Alex Kirby. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* developed primarily, as Peirse notes, from the previous success and aesthetic of *The Box of Delights*.³⁸⁸ Home agrees, stating that 'by the time the rights were finally acquired, technology had evolved far enough to make a convincing production practical. Paul Stone, the producer, had already pioneered many of the techniques used in the series in his 1984 production of *The Box of Delights*'.³⁸⁹ In actuality, while *The Box of Delights* had foregrounded these fantastic effects in a children's prestige drama as they had not been used before, the techniques had been developed long before then. From the 1970s, Ian Keill and Andrew Gosling had been producing just this kind of hybridised live action/CSO/cel animation fantasy drama for the BBC, specifically for the Christmas broadcasting period. These productions did not come out of the Children's department but bizarrely out of BBC 2 Presentation. As Keill describes it, being left to their own devices, Presentation staff had taken advantage of the spaces and technology then becoming available to them

³⁸⁸ Alison Peirse 'A broken tradition: British telefantasy and children's television in the 1980s and 1990s' in *Visual Culture in Britain* 11, no. 1 2010: (109-124), 110-111

³⁸⁹ Anna Home, interview with author, London, June 21st, 2013

and had begun to experiment with drama form and aesthetic.³⁹⁰ Subsequently, they had instituted a semi-regular production schedule of adaptations aimed at the family market, both domestic and overseas, and marketed through the emerging home video format. Production aesthetics developed in the 1976 production *The Snow Queen* (see Fig. 6) and *The Light Princess* (1978), such as the interlacing of animation and live-action to create composited action, were then further developed in *The Box of Delights* (1984) and *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1988-90).



Fig. 6: Aesthetic hybridity in *The Snow Queen* (BBC, 1976)

Like *The Box of Delights*, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* fused live action drama, Colour Separation Overlay, and cel animation to create a fantastic narrative. However, one of the key features of the fantastic was the creation of Aslan, a

³⁹⁰ 'The Innes Book of Records: Ian Keill Producer/Director' [<http://neilinnes.org/ibor/creators/iankeill.html>] (accessed 06/08/13)

fully animatronic lion puppet. While the production was internationally co-financed, the drama, including, effects appear to have been created in-house. The animation for example was created at Television Centre, according to the credits, and Aslan was developed by the Visual Effects Department at the BBC. The end result was a melange of formats drawn together as the *mise en scene*, as seen in the shots below. However, in the later serials, the effects are more restrained, and the location filming even more expansive. While *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* had filmed in Aviemore for the winter scenes, *Prince Caspian* and particularly *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* and *The Silver Chair* required even grander vistas. The production of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* used a full-size ship and filming at sea in the Scilly Isles to recreate Caspian's voyage to the Lone Islands. Once again, physical effects such as full-body puppets for dragons, partial bodysuits and prosthetics for Reepicheep (Warwick Davies), and miniature models of the Dawn Treader on stormy seas were used to create the fantastic, the use of animation as an imbricated aesthetic was notably more limited and restrained, used mostly for atmospheric effects and short, overlaid effects rather than fully interlaced action (see Figs. 7 & 8).



Fig. 7: *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (BBC, 1988),
animation by TVC



Fig. 8: *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (BBC, 1989),
animation by Animation City

This may have been due to the textural and aesthetic messiness of the first series. The reduction in animation quantity and shift in narrative purpose may equally be attributed to production planning. In interview Alex Kirby stated:

[G]etting the animation into live action was amazingly difficult. It's much easier now but at that time it had to be shot in a very specific way and the animation had to be done in loops. Remember, it was cel animation; it wasn't being chunked into a computer where you could actually, with an algorithm, begin to animate them. It was all literally hand-cel animation so there was a time constraint between when we shot the material and the actual post-production edit and the animation schedule had to fit that time. That's the limitation.³⁹¹

The animation aspect was further limited in *Prince Caspian*, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* and *The Silver Chair*, as its provision moved from the BBC to production company, Animation City.

With the use of camera 'roll-back' on such effects as the miraculous healing of Puddleglum in *The Silver Chair*, cel animation overlay and colour separation overlay (all serials), the camera had to be static and the shots had to be shot-listed to meet transmission. In addition, production spaces had to be expansive enough to enable both action and expansive blue and green-screen overlay, and the recreation of a full-size ship and flying dragons in studio. Consequently, the aesthetic shifted within the *Chronicles* between 1988 and 1990. Colour separation overlay and location filming became much more strongly represented in the latter three serials, as production

³⁹¹ Alex Kirby, interview with author, Bristol, November 16th 2012

strategies under the control of the BBC and contributive to the construction of the texts as both fantastic and ‘heritage’, but cel animation became restricted to peripheral and time-limited appearances rather than an integral part of the narrative. As a consequence, the *Chronicles* became a more cohesive and contiguous production, aided by the consistent appearance not only of the child actors playing the Pevensies and their cousin, Eustace, but also adult actors playing multiple roles: Barbara Kellerman as the White Witch, the Hag, and the Green Lady; ‘Big Mick’ as the Witch’s Dwarf and Trumpkin, Warwick Davis as Glimfeather and Reepicheep, and Leslie Nicol as both Mrs Beaver and the Giant Queen, and not least the voice of Ronald Pickup as Aslan throughout all the texts. The repeated employment of recognisable adult actors, the use of extensive location filming and the emphasis given to the expense of the *Chronicles* suggest that it was being articulated as ‘quality’ television, a term making heavy play in the public and institutional circles of the late 1980s.³⁹² Further, these continuities make clear that Narnia was not intended as a heterogeneous production but a consistent and unified production spanning several years, thereby integrating serials and long-form drama, and public service values and commercial appeal through a contested period for the BBC.

Children’s ITV, 1980-1990

The 1980s were, for the ITV companies producing children’s television, a pivotal and arguably defining decade. The 1981 franchise round sutured ever more firmly the public service requirements to the contractual obligations of the ITV companies, and with educationalist Lady Plowden at the helm of the IBA, children’s programmes were publicly and avowedly

³⁹² See Charlotte Brunson, ‘Problems With Quality’ in *Screen* 31 (1): 67-90. doi:10.1093/screen/31.1.67. (accessed January 7th 2016) for a further elaboration of British ‘quality’ television in the 1980s

at the heart of these values. Anna Home confirmed this in interview, stating

The reason I was part of the TVS franchise, which was twelve men and me, was that Lady Plowden had made it known that children's was a concern and that's why they shoved me in to major on children's and according to some of the histories, it was one of the elements that gave us the franchise.³⁹³

As a result, programming for children became more than merely symbolic of public service values within the ITV companies. It became part of the praxis of the ITV companies' contracts with the IBA and with the audience, supporting Maire Messenger Davies' assertion that '[s]creen media for children, far from being an innocent and valuefree area of culture, is often found at the cutting edge of the clash between public service values and the market, currently dominating public discourse about broadcasting.'³⁹⁴

Consequently, while Jeremy Potter et al state that the 1980/81 contract changes altered the face of ITV, simultaneously it shifted the landscape of children's television. From the early 1980s, as in 1968, the contract changes opened up the arena of children's television to new approaches, new production cultures and new companies. Chief among these were Central (previously ATV) and TVS, the new contractor for what had been the franchise area for Southern Television, which had itself been no stranger to children's television. Consequently, the constitution and operation of the Network Children's Subcommittee re-oriented itself towards these new interests. One of the first major changes was in the chairmanship of the Network Children's Subcommittee. John Hambley of Thames Television was appointed chairman from the beginning of 1981

³⁹³ Author's interview with Home

³⁹⁴ Maire Messenger Davies, 'Crazyspace: the politics of children's screen drama' in *Screen*, Sept 2005 Vol 46 Issue 3

upon the resignation of Francis Essex, and promptly proposed radical changes to the Subcommittee's operation including 'considerably longer term and more centralised planning of schedules', up to 'four quarters in advance on a rolling basis.' Forward planning, suggested Hambley, would improve 'the proposed balance of the schedule'. He also proposed that all companies, not just regionals, should submit their productions for pre-approval. The response was unsurprisingly unfavourable but Hambley argued that the quality and balance of the schedules could be improved with 'a spirit of co-operation and willingness on the part of all companies to listen to the views the Sub-Committee might express'.³⁹⁵ Hambley also encouraged further audience research into children's programming. In this model of increased forward planning, centralisation, and concern with the needs of the child audience, it is possible to draw comparisons with the structure and oversight of the BBC Children's department. This structure was reinforced farther with the introduction of Anna Home to the Subcommittee. Not only was TVS Children's producing, under her administration, children's drama with immediate effect, but she also engaged actively with the operation of the Subcommittee from the outset, and introduced the idea of an anthology drama series which could act as a unifying production strategy and banner across the ITV companies. As a result, *Dramarama*, seven series of single plays, came into being, often with a supernatural theme. However, Home stated that this generic preoccupation was circumstantial and 'in the air' rather than strategic in interview, emphasising rather *Dramarama*'s heterogeneity: '*Dramarama* was interesting in as much as there was theoretically an overall executive producer

³⁹⁵ IBA archive file 133/9/1, NCSC Minutes 22nd January 1981

but depending on who that was, they didn't necessarily interfere much and that's why they were so disparate really.'³⁹⁶

However, within the NCSC minutes, the proposal for *Dramarama* was more broadly than its production suggested and was, furthermore, interestingly situated within a discourse of literariness and quality.

There was to be no overall theme for this strand, to which a number of companies were contributing and while the work of several distinguished children's writers, eg Leon Garfield and Alan Garner, would be featured *Dramarama* might also be an opportunity for new writers to be tried out. The objective was quality within the constraint of budgetary limits: writers might feel inhibited by low budgets but the discipline these imposed might be no bad thing.³⁹⁷

Drama production for children and more particularly families was therefore being driven by economic and industrial shifts, but was still very much focused, at least within the early 1980s, upon public service values similar to those operating within the BBC. However, another production ecology was developing children's and family drama with an approach less acutely responsive to the franchise. One key trend of ITV children's and ITV in general during the 1980s was a surge in international co-productions. HTV West, in particular, had begun to move towards international co-produced adaptations such as *Kidnapped*, *Return to Treasure Island* and *Robin of Sherwood*. It is perhaps no coincidence that Patrick Dromgoole's attendance at Subcommittee meetings fell sharply during this period, as did HTV West's production of children's fantasy drama. This passion for co-productions across the ITV

³⁹⁶ Anna Home, interview with author, London, June 21st, 2013

³⁹⁷ ITA/IBA Box 3995724: File 133/9/1 Network Planning Committee Children's Sub-Committee: March 1981-DEC 1982 Vol 3, AGM November 16th 1982

companies in the 1980s was driven by a variety of factors, such as the increasingly global nature of broadcasting and the need to compete with new technologies such as cable and satellite. However, the most compelling reason for ITV companies to make co-productions was financial: under the terms of the Exchequer Levy, any profit made on overseas sales was exempt from the Levy tax. Domestic production would count towards their contractual obligations but the international profit from pre-sales would go directly to the company. In short, the ‘levy trick’, according to Rod Allen, could allow an ITV company to suggest that ‘it [had] fulfilled its obligation to provide a public service with high-cost and prestigious programming, while at the same time enjoying quite remarkable financial returns from following this policy.’³⁹⁸

This push towards international co-production, I suggest, is the cause of the exponential drop in HTV West’s children’s drama. By 1982 HTV had run into trouble with the IBA over its drama production strategy and its children’s output diminished as a result of the financial overspend. Always keen on international co-productions as a means of expanding storytelling and maximising budget and return, Dromgoole had run into trouble with a co-production called *Goliath Awaits*. A Times report rather gleefully suggested that, following the levy profit and the transatlantic sales *The Curse of Tutankhamun* had made for HTV previously, this had been a co-production too far and that the ‘IBA let it be known that Dromgoole had presumed too much’. HTV lost a substantial amount when they had to pull out of the co-production, although this did not stop Dromgoole from proceeding with other, more carefully organised co-productions thereafter, such as *Return to Treasure Island*, *Robin of Sherwood*, *Arch of Triumph*, *Master of Ballantrae*, and

³⁹⁸ Rod Allen ‘London Weekend Television in the 1980s’ programmes, public service obligations, financial incentives’ in *ITV Cultures* ed. Catherine Johnson and Rob Turnock (London and New York: Open University Press, 2005) (109-119), 111

Jenny's War. *The Guardian* saw this precedence as in part driven by Dromgoole's own conviction that, in the face of imminent cable and satellite investment and the questioning of the BBC licence fee structure, 'ITV's monopoly of advertising in Britain [was] beginning to crack'. Peter Fiddick calls Dromgoole 'one of nature's co-producers', and there were even allegations in 1984 that under Dromgoole's management, HTV West was nothing more than a facilities house for co-productions.³⁹⁹ Until 1982, Dromgoole kept the company's hand in producing drama for young people and children, although on a much reduced scale. Notably, serials in the early 1980s were *Jangles* (1982) and *Into the Labyrinth* (1981-82), both of which were made under stringent spatial and financial conditions, re-using the same set over and over again and creating aesthetics through the economic Chromakey. With the advent of *Dramarama* in 1983, much of the children's drama output from HTV seems to have been channelled into the small-scale, guaranteed single play form to be fitted into the nationally networked anthology.

Despite this widespread trend towards globalised and commercial production, at new franchise holder, Television South, Anna Home and her deputy John Dale were producing fantasy drama that challenged the boundaries of genre, medium and audience expectations. Responding to the IBA mandated public service push from 1981, they formulated a production culture that was as innovative and radical as their productions. In this, they were aided by Home's experience of production management and dramaturgy, and Dale's previous career in the theatre. However, they were also assisted by the federal structure of ITV and the form of the single play. *Dramarama*, formed under Home, was repeatedly used as an anthology in

³⁹⁹ Richard Collins, Nicholas Garnham, Gareth Locksley *The economics of television: the UK case* (London: Sage, 1988), 71

which challenging material could be produced and contained, following the theorisation of Jowett and Abbot, and Cook and Wright, of television fantasy as a genre which could be used to ‘worry at’ serious social issues.⁴⁰⁰⁴⁰¹ The production of fantastic drama which approached the radical was facilitated by a production culture at TVS which incorporated the theatrical with the televisual. John Dale, in establishing the Saturday morning children’s show *No. 73*, made performers take part in improvisational workshops to establish their characters and remain in character for the duration of rehearsals and broadcasts. The set of *No. 73* itself was even built ‘in the round’. As a result, the conventions and aesthetics of radical theatre contributed to the development of drama at TVS throughout the early to mid-1980s, supported by the strong departmental and television drama production background of Home. In addition to this, Home’s long-standing commitment to children as a particular audience who ‘need to be talked to, as a child, in your own terms and in your own emotional terms’⁴⁰², and to children’s literature, underpinned the new direction of TVS Children’s with a particularised production culture based on collaboration, literariness and the needs of the child audience.

Hambley’s approach to the Subcommittee and Home’s approach to drama production at TVS therefore shared a common origin. The 1981 contract changes, orchestrated by Lady Plowden, had been structured around the ITA’s wish for stronger public service values within ITV programming, and were subsequently consolidated at the 1981 ITA Children’s Consultation at which Hambley advocated for an ITV ‘television service centred on the needs and responses of that quarter of the audience who were children’, rather than ‘the ill-

⁴⁰⁰ Jowett and Abbott *TV Horror*, 2

⁴⁰¹ Cook and Wright, *British Science Fiction Television*

⁴⁰² Anna Home, interview with author, London, June 21st, 2013

assorted rag-bag of reach-me-down programmes' currently offered.⁴⁰³ The same Consultation identified the child audience's preference for BBC as part of the appeal of schedule and brand familiarity, which may have spurred the subsequent development of ITV Children's programme stranding, branding and schedule restructuring throughout the 1980s. In 1983, Children's ITV had launched as a unified and heavily promoted schedule, the same year that the first series of the cross-company *Dramarama* was transmitted. This unification and centralisation of schedule and brand was bolstered still further when Central Independent Television, newly liberated from Lew Grade and his disregard for children's programmes, moved decisively to take control of much of the new children's schedules output, presentation and transmission.

Charles Denton, Controller of Programmes at Central, had arguably also been liberated from Grade's control, and in the wake of this new independence, he recruited Lewis Rudd from the foundering Southern and installed him as Controller of Children's Programmes. Subsequently, Central would move towards a more intensive production of children's television and a more secure grasp on the children's schedules through Denton's Chairmanship of the Subcommittee from December 1981⁴⁰⁴ and the transmission of schedule promotion from Central. Earlier that year, Denton had also become part of a Children's Working Party within the IBA 'set up [...] to consider the structural and policy matters which might require change in the field of ITV children's output.'⁴⁰⁵ The commitment of Central to a new production culture of children's programmes was indicated by their establishment of what came to be called the Nottingham-based Central Junior

⁴⁰³ ITA/IBA Archive Box 3995724 File 225/15 Children's Consultation, Vol.1 *Children's Programmes on Independent Television: A Report of an IBA Consultation Held in Cambridge, July, 1981* September 1981

⁴⁰⁴ ITA/IBA archive file 133/9/1 Network Planning Committee Children's Sub-Committee: March 1981- Dec 1982 NCSC Minutes September 17th 1981

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid

Television Workshop, which was created as ‘a youth theatre [...] with a specific focus on television and film-making’,⁴⁰⁶ under producers Peter Murphy and Sue Nott. The Workshop recruited children from across Central’s franchise region, with an emphasis upon increasing and facilitating child performance within children’s television, as well as the representation of regional accents and ethnic diversity within the local area (see Nott and Rudd in appendices). The Workshop was instrumental in developing several semi-improvised comedy series, performed and devised by the Workshop members, which deployed fantasy elements as part of its surrealist and satiric mode. *Palace Hill*, a live-action *Spitting Image* about the royal princes, William and Harry, attending a run-down comprehensive in which the Head Girl was Margaret Thatcher, used science fiction-inspired monsters like the Mother Cracker, a gargantuan Cream Cracker, a space princess and a time-travelling toilet as narrative devices. The Workshop and Sue Nott were also involved in the development of a later science fiction/fantasy drama for Children’s ITV, *Wail of the Banshee* (see Chapter Six).

From 1983, however, the Central Children’s department proper was producing television fantasy drama on a regular basis, beginning with 1984’s *Luna*, starring a very young Patsy Kensit as space-faring ‘diminibeing’ assigned to a ‘habiviron’ on the Moon. Rudd freely admitted that it was, in large part, made appealing by the co-producers, and not merely in the financial sense. Rudd said, ‘I think I was probably a bit besotted at working with Mickey Dolenz who produced and directed it [but] I did think the scripts were very funny.’⁴⁰⁷ Subsequent Central fantasy dramas were often co-productions, potentially indicating a move towards international co-productions which

⁴⁰⁶ Sue Nott, interview with author, London, August 16th 2013

⁴⁰⁷ Lewis Rudd, phone Interview with author, July 10th 2013

could both facilitate children's production and take advantage of the Levy exemptions: *The Worst Witch*, a musical adaptation from Jill Murphy's books made with HBO, *The Secret World of Polly Flint*, a collaboration between Central and children's author, Helen Cresswell, and an adaptation of Allan Ahlberg's *Woof!*, about a boy who turns into a dog, which ran for nine series.

At TVS, however, in the early 1980s, the Children's department was experimenting with form and aesthetic rather than with co-production. The drama production at TVS responded to Home's BBC experience and her ideology that children should have their own drama, whether mimetic or fantastic, which would prepare them psychologically for the world. In so doing, it situated fantasy as a good in itself, as a lens upon contemporary Britain's culture, society, politics and the place of the child within this discourse. This reflected Davies' later suggestion that

Here, televised storytelling was not a matter of institutional kudos, nor of setting good social examples; instead it permitted a private psychological transformation, what Bettelheim (reprinted in Lohr and Meyer, 1999), in an essay about the psychological advantages of television drama, describes as 'day-dreaming'. The experience of drama for the child quoted above was an opportunity for everyday school life to be remade as 'weird'. It was its 'strangeness' that made her 'want to watch more'. In a sense, this child was describing alienation - 'a representation that allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar', as Bertolt Brecht put it (in Willett, 1964, p. 192).⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁸ Davies *Dear BBC*, 71

Davies' construction of the defamiliarising and thus reconstitutive properties of fantasy are likewise at work in the TVS production for *Dramarama*, 'The Young Person's Guide to Getting Their Ball Back.'

Dramarama: 'The Young Person's Guide to Getting Their Ball Back' (TVS, 1983)

'The Young Person's Guide to Getting their Ball Back' was one of the single plays which comprised the first series of *Dramarama* and was perhaps not entirely coincidentally broadcast on 31st October 1983.⁴⁰⁹ The concurrence of the transmission with Halloween might have been more apposite for an episode from the first half of the 1983 *Dramarama* run, which broadcast under the title *Dramarama: Spooky*. However, 'The Young Person's Guide to Getting Their Ball Back' is perhaps just as terrifying, due to the defamiliarising and re-constitutive nature of the text. 'The Young Person's Guide to Getting their Ball Back' follows the nameless Boy into a dark, mysterious and claustrophobic space only to be imprisoned there by the unbalanced inhabitants. The play followed the original brief for *Dramarama*, shaped as it was by low budgets but high 'quality' associations. This dichotomy was resolved through an entirely studio-bound performance and a surrealist and satirical script by established playwright, Nigel Baldwin.

While studio-bound productions are commonly held to be aesthetically and narratively confining, 'The Young Person's Guide' takes advantage of the enclosed production space to produce a stylised and defamiliarised analogue of recognisable cultural spaces. Likewise the pantomime performances of the shed's residents is recognisable from public political discourse.

⁴⁰⁹ The TVTimes Project 1955-1985 [<http://bufvc.ac.uk/tvandrado/tvtip/index.php/prog/247383>] (accessed September 27th 2014)

Using the studio space as a form of what Foucault calls a heterotopia, an ‘other’ space invested with several layers of meaning, media and performance, ‘The Young Person’s Guide’ construes the bedlam space of the shed as the political spaces of contemporary Britain: the shed is the House of Commons, the Grand Vamp the Prime Minister, and the ineffectual but ‘nice’ Rita and George the Opposition.⁴¹⁰

The theatrical performances within a set that resembles a black box theatre and the deliberately distancing language, in which omissions and obfuscation fragment the dialogue, complicate any idea of mimesis. Radical theatre and the television production process was therefore at the heart of the TVS play. Using Brecht’s theory of alienation, the play uses the fantastic as a distancing technique to satirise the political establishment. This fantastic allegory unites the production space and the cultural milieu by re-articulating the studio into a self-referential world in which property matters more than human rights: ‘a window has been killed’ Patrick Troughton’s character tells the Grand Vamp after it is smashed by the protagonist’s football. Her subsequent directive to punish the boy and the subsequent collusion of Lovely Rita and the apparently friendlier party in opposition emphasises the absence of citizens from the democratic process. It also subtly interrogates Thatcher’s own declaration that ‘there’s no such thing as society’.⁴¹¹

The entire play is shot wholly on video and in studio, apart from very brief framing sequences of boys playing football in the street at each end of the play. The videotape technology enhances the colour so what looks bright in the quotidian world

⁴¹⁰ Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowicz ‘Of Other Spaces’ in *Diacritics* Vol. 16, No. 1 (Spring, 1986), pp. 22-27 DOI: 10.2307/464648

⁴¹¹ Lester D. Friedman *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism* (London & New York: Wallflower Press, 2006) 2nd edtn, 240

looks garish and a little grotesque in the fantasy world (see Figs. 9 and 10), and the distancing effect is compounded by the gnomonic utterances of the Instructor, a clown and janitor played by David Troughton, who declares that his 'tasks include instructing ignoramuses like you in the art of etiquette and the skills of living'.



Fig. 9: Patrick Troughton as the Instructor, *Dramarama*
'The Young Person's Guide to Getting Their Ball Back'



Fig. 10: The Grand Vamp and Lovely Rita, *Dramarama* 'The Young Person's Guide to Getting Their Ball Back'

The Boy is hauled in front of the inhabitants of the shed, who accuse him of killing a window with a football, and put him on trial to see whether he should be released or destroyed in the Vat. The trial itself takes the form of a debate and a kangaroo court, and it is here that I wish to argue for a textual analysis at the most basic of levels. Since both production and narrative spaces are enclosed and both movement and *mise-en-scene* are limited, much of the fantastic is created at the level of language. Words are repeatedly omitted or misused, forcing the child viewer to recognise the difference between what is said and what is meant, reinforcing the association of the text with the Foucauldian heterotopia. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault suggests that '[h]eterotopias are disturbing probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it

impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite each other) to hold together.'⁴¹² In illustration, the Grand Vamp, a thinly disguised analogue of the Iron Lady with stilted diction, a head of flamingly red hair and a host of toadies to support her side, declares the word 'football' to be 'obscene', and forbids anyone to use it in speech. Subsequently, the Boy, the opposing side and her own supporters are forced into increasing verbal athletics in an attempt not to use the word ball, substituting instead 'that', 'the round thing' and 'the spherical object'. Not only does this create an alienation effect, distancing the viewer from the action in a Brechtian manner, it also 'destroys syntax' and destabilises epistemology as Foucault suggests the heterotopia does, and in so doing also mimics the language and self-referential logic of politics and the law.

Thus, the Grand Vamp declares in opposition to the release of the Boy that

in these austere times life is not for having fun. Life is for putting the nose to the grindstone and working. We are not here, friends and enemies, to indulge in the frivolous pastime of having fun. We are all here to get us back on our feet again and work our fingers to the bone. [...] Life is a serious business and if I return this spherical object that boy up there will continue to have fun.

Such empty rhetoric and grandiloquence is therefore ironically framed in the tradition of paternalism and public service, as consensus politics without the consensus. This framing is

⁴¹² Michel Foucault *The Order of Things: An archaeology of the human sciences* (London & New York: Routledge, 2005), xix

reinforced by the repeated statements that the Boy's imprisonment and potential punishment is for his own good.

However this is equal opportunity satire. Lovely Rita, the Opposition Leader, is initially shown to be nice but ineffectual, dressed in a cardigan and emotionally appealing for justice to the Speaker, Mr Monkey, when she is shouted down. However, as the play advances, it becomes apparent that Lovely Rita and her party, too, are speaking a double language. As the Grand Vamp points out, Rita doesn't really care, 'she just needs to be seen to care'; in short, she needs to construct herself oppositionally to the Grand Vamp, when they are in fact both invested in maintaining the status quo. 'Look,' says the Grand Vamp to Rita, in a moment of biting satire, 'if you let me win this one, I'll let you win the next one. I want to stay here. I'd be useless out there: we all would, none of us could survive out there.'

Thus, the world outside the space of production and narrative is constructed as alien and frightening, one again setting up a false dichotomy. The relationship between the inside and the outside textual spaces and the uncanniness that inheres to its dynamic is demonstrated in this exchange between the Instructor and the Grand Vamp:

Grand Vamp: where does [the Boy] come from,
Instructor?

Instructor: From Southampton, I believe, Your
Goodness.

Grand Vamp: Where is that?

Instructor: About a thousand miles away, Your
Goodness.

Boy: It's just outside!

Grand Vamp: Oh, fiddlesticks and fumble, I'm tired of making decisions for people who live thousands of miles away.

Fat Cat Tommy: It's not as if we have the slightest interests in common.

Thus, both demonstrate their disregard for the boy's reality and their disregard for their people and the nation they claim to represent, adding a further level of distance to the narrative.

The dizzying and distancing effects of the language are reinforced by the formal and stylistic properties of the production. While the studio is relatively large, the set divides it into separate structures: the slide and the Vat, the debating floor and the stands, and the antechamber. When the Boy is first introduced to the debating floor, a long, slow dolly shot from the boy into the activity of the debate and ending on a man, dressed as a monkey and swinging on a tyre, creates a dreamlike and surreal effect. Further, since movement is therefore restricted both by the production space itself and the set, the camerawork and editing works to create a tight, contrapuntal movement, circling the performer as the performer circles the camera at several points. Additional movement within the confines of the studio is created by set dressing which sets up different heights. High angle shots from the top of the slide emphasise the Boy's isolation from the decisions being taken on his behalf. The play ends on an even more disturbing pattern of movement: when the boy breaks free and is pursued around the entire hall, the action is artificially slowed down and then frozen as what sounds like 'Sieg Heil' is chanted in the background.

Further radicalism in children's drama in both political critique and form could be seen in the TVS production of 'Frog' for

Dramarama, which drew howls of outrage from the Establishment. 'Frog', an allegorical drama about a frog who monopolises all the water in the garden pond, was so thinly veiled that questions were raised about its subversive ideology in the House of Lords. Lord Charteris of Amisfield objected to the production in the strongest terms, calling it a 'TV horror comic,' a 'horrible TV show for young children was designed specifically to indoctrinate them against the acceptance of authority and, by the ugliness of the symbols, to degrade the whole concept of Western culture'. Angry letters were received from the Aims of Industry organisation which accused it of being 'political propaganda', 'anti-nuclear, anti capitalist media, anti "military commercial"', and so on.⁴¹³ Less challenging but no less fantastic *Dramarama* instalments by TVS were science fiction plays 'The Universe Downstairs' and 'Jack and the Computers.' In serials and in single plays for *Dramarama*, TVS recapitulated many of the BBC Children's values and structures, as well as Home's own fondness for fantasy and adaptation, fused with a radical form and political comment that was unique to TVS in the early 1980s.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have sought to demonstrate how fantasy drama was responding to different interpretations of public service values within the regulated duopoly of the 1980s. Television South's remit as an new independent television company, who had partially gained their franchise through their commitment to children's programming, opened up ITV children's drama to new influences and contemporary, contentious issues in a way, arguably, it had not been before. TVS dramas synthesised Anna Home's long-held views on the

⁴¹³ ITA/IBA Archive Box 3996260 File: *Dramarama* Viewer's Correspondence 5003/25 Vol 1 February 24th 1986

particular nature of the child audience and the usefulness of fantasy to their emotional, social and educational development with the theatrical experience of form, performance and practice John Dale had developed. However, it is worth noting that even with this remit to challenge the orthodoxies of children's television, these dramas are still framed as fantasy, suggesting that the distancing technique might be as much for safety as revelation. A response from the IBA to a letter of complaint about *Frog* suggests innocently that it is simply a 'somewhat surreal allegory'.⁴¹⁴

Upon Home's return to the BBC, however, the deployment of radical forms and political critique within children's television was not as viable. After the narrow escape of the Peacock Committee Report, the anticipated threats to the BBC structure and funding of the 1988 White Paper, and the increasing contestation of public service broadcasting itself, there was no place for controversial fantasy drama. The fantasy dramas of late 1980s BBC therefore cunningly played to those values the Conservative government themselves had espoused or, at the very least, could not object to: heritage, literacy and popular, profitable appeal. *The Chronicles of Narnia* met these criteria while also suggesting Home's own long career in fantasy drama for children, and her commitment to it in the future.

⁴¹⁴ ITA/IBA Archive Box 3996260 File: *Dramarama* Viewer's Correspondence 5003/25 Vol 1 November 16th 1985

Chapter Six: An Inevitable Decline? Fantasy Drama, 1990-1994

Introduction

In the wake of 1990, the tenor of British broadcasting changed forever. With the passing of the 1990 Broadcasting Act, television became a medium that would have to both justify its own existence and pay its own way in a manner that could not have been envisaged in the 1950s. However, politicians and institutions still recoiled from explicitly describing it as a purely commercial broadcasting model, despite the back-handed deal which handed control of British Sky Broadcasting to Rupert Murdoch, the decommissioning of the IBA from a regulatory to a 'light touch' licensing body, and the pressure on the BBC to improve efficiency which led to the introduction of the BBC internal market, Producer Choice. In addition, the proliferating channels of cable, satellite, and even terrestrial with the advent of Channel Five was accelerating competition for audiences and airwaves past anything that had been seen in the previous fifty years of British broadcasting. Coupled with the new independent quota imposed by the government from 1992, this meant that the old models of funding, production and audience targets were no longer sustainable. Broadcasters had to find new ways to reconcile public service values and the economic imperatives which had been pressed upon them by the Conservative government throughout the 1980s, in their pursuit of free market enterprise across British society and culture: 'The radical atmosphere spawned by the Conservative government of Mrs Thatcher had finally and seriously spilled over into a

discussion about the future of the BBC, and therefore of public service broadcasting.⁴¹⁵

As a result, the old certainties and structures of children's broadcasting at the BBC and ITV were rapidly crumbling and new approaches, audiences and technologies were having to be found. The case studies appended to this chapter illustrate two modes of the fantastic and the moment of flux in which they were produced. *Century Falls* (BBC, 1993) and *Wail of the Banshee* (Central, 1992) recapitulate the traditional concerns of children's television drama for a post-1990 production culture, having to renegotiate the old tensions of children's television: adult/children, local/national, and change/continuity, within a more globally commercial and less nationally protected model. Children's producers at both the BBC and ITV companies were fighting a rear-guard action against structural change that meant children's television production was being irrevocably altered and its purpose and policies reformulated forever.

Children's drama was at the forefront of that cluster of anxieties at work in broadcasting in the early 1990s, reiterating Davies' statement that '[s]creen media for children, far from being an innocent and valuefree area of culture, is often found at the cutting edge of the clash between public service values and the market, currently dominating public discourse about broadcasting'.⁴¹⁶ These anxieties located around the risk to public service broadcasting led the BBC Children's department to commission a review of the child audience and their response to drama across the regulated duopoly, by Maire Messenger Davies and Kate O'Malley. The Review was subsequently reformatted into *Dear BBC* by Davies, who locates its origins as 'an empirical study, funded by the BBC and the London

⁴¹⁵ Tracey *The Decline and Fall of Public Service Broadcasting*, 108

⁴¹⁶ Davies, 'Crazyspace' *Screen* 46:3, 391

Institute, with children aged between 5 and 13 years, in different parts of England and Wales'. She continued

The study was seen as necessary at the time because the BBC, as a major public service broadcaster, was, and is, having to adapt to the fact that broadcasting around the world is changing irrevocably from a channel-scarcity system to a system where viewers are promised access to hundreds of channels, via digital technology, and where the subjective experience of viewing is expected to change from 'passive entertainment' to 'interactivity' and consumer choice through new computer technology.⁴¹⁷

The commissioning of such a review is evidence enough that, by 1994, BBC Children's were seriously worried about the long-term future of children's television drama, both within the multichannel era and within the BBC of the 1990s.

ITV companies, too, were experiencing difficulty in the wake of the Broadcasting Act. While the Act mandated 'at least 10 hours per week of children's programmes',⁴¹⁸ the financial deficits afflicting several companies, like HTV West, in the aftermath of the franchise auction hobbled production. When, a year later, the regulations governing ITV company ownership were relaxed, these issues were compounded as the Act had left some ITV companies open to hostile takeovers from the rest of the previous federal ITV, and a further move towards centralisation in the Network Centre meant that, more than ever, children's drama was an expensive risk with little prospect of financial return.

⁴¹⁷ Davies *Dear BBC*, 1

⁴¹⁸ Christopher Gasson *Media Equities: Evaluation and Trading* (Cambridge: Woodhead Publishing Ltd, 1996), 118

BBC Children's, 1990-1994

In 1990, a report in *Marketing* magazine declared that '[t]he BBC has the majority of the children's audience,' adding, 'So what is ITV doing wrong?'⁴¹⁹

By 1990, Anna Home had had four years to consolidate the children's output, and had done so with both caution and cunning. Despite major industrial shifts such as the introduction of the independent quota and institutional change like the introduction of Producer Choice, she managed to maintain a drama output that was consistently challenging and of high quality. Yet this did not come without compromises. Chief amongst these was the interdependent relationship she had forged between public service and commerce. In 1987, she admitted in a memo that '[s]o far we have never admitted, and nobody has discovered, that the BBC takes a percentage of the merchandising revenue from series like *Thundercats*. I think that we could find ourselves in an embarrassing situation, should this come to light, particularly at a time when there is so much discussion about product placement and free commercials.'⁴²⁰ It was therefore, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, not simply the closer relationship between public service values and commerce that was the issue but the management of the image of the department and the place of that relationship within it. BBC Children's was looking for new ways to represent and fund itself. In the 1990s, one potential avenue emerged which could rearticulate BBC Children's within a global and commercial model and move drama production within BBC Children's into a new phase.

⁴¹⁹ Harold Lind 'The BBC has the majority of the children's audience. So what is ITV doing wrong' in *Marketing* 10 May 1990: 5. Expanded Academic ASAP.
[URL:<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA9018971&v=2.1&u=leicester&it=r&p=&sw=w&asid=90374dfdc6e445d73232c4a4c2079937>] (Accessed January 7th 2016)

⁴²⁰ BBC WAC B213-002 Children's Programmes General Part 1 'Acquired/Commissioned Children's Programmes: Merchandising Rights' H.C.P.Tel. to James Arnold Baker, October 14th 1987

'[O]n becoming Director General in 1987,' declare Barnett and Curry, 'Michael Checkland announced that one of his objectives for the BBC was that Enterprises should develop as a commercial concern.' Endorsed by the Director General himself, the new head of Enterprises, James Arnold-Baker, previously of Fisher-Price Toys, developed a five-year plan 'which became known internally as "the dash for growth"'.⁴²¹ However, as Barnett and Curry point out, much of Enterprises' early expansion was 'into areas which had not even the most tenuous relationship with the BBC's core broadcasting concerns, thus fuelling a long-standing distrust of the division by those who were making the programmes which Enterprises exploited.'⁴²² While Enterprises had been established in 1960, after 1986 it took the lead in consolidating and commercialising BBC properties across the board as part of a Corporation-wide drive to respond both to the financial pressures of the 1980s and a changing public and political conception of public service. One of the first relationships it formed was with BBC Children's.

There may well have been some element of distrust by the Children's department with their vigorously defended departmental philosophy, but it does not seem to have lasted long. Links between the Children's department and Enterprises were rapidly formed and specialised; meetings between the two departments were already taking place in December 1986, just six months after Home's appointment, at which it was proposed that the working group should meet every three months, emphasising the increasingly close and collaborative ties between children's television and corporate enterprise within the BBC.⁴²³ By June of the following year, one of the clauses in a

⁴²¹ Barnett and Curry *Battle for the BBC*, 130-1

⁴²² Ibid

⁴²³ BBC WAC B213-002 'Minutes of Enterprises and Children's Programmes Liaison Meeting' December 16th 1986

summary of a programming offers meeting with then Director of Programmes, Television, Michael Grade, situated Enterprises as part of the ongoing development of the Children's department, stating that in the Animation field, 'you are discussing a number of long-term projects with Enterprises.'⁴²⁴ However, animation was not the only strand upon which the relationship between Children's and Enterprises operated. A BBC WAC document, BBC Television Children's Programmes and their Exploitation by BBC Enterprises', stated that '[t]he two areas of programming which the majority of Enterprises' sales divisions can successfully exploit are animation and quality drama.'⁴²⁵

To fully explore the potential of animation as a potential revenue stream, the Children's Development Unit was established in 1990. *The Stage* reported in October 1990 that the unit under the control of Theresa Plummer-Andrews would be 'responsible for identifying new ideas and nurturing them for the international markets,' and that the Unit would 'invest several million pounds over the next three to five years in new projects, principally in animation.'⁴²⁶ While its initial focus was on animation as a mode with potential for national and global sales, the Unit's formation and development illustrates the mechanisms deployed in re-articulating Children's BBC from a public service broadcaster to one which took commercial opportunity into account in equal measure. It was not merely a case of moving from public service broadcasting to profit but of finding ways to balance the two.

The convergence of form, drama and market forces established in the mid to late 1980s would be focused and expedited by the further creation of BBC Children's International in April

⁴²⁴ BBC WAC B213-002, 'Editorials/Offers (Part 1)' D.P.Tel. to H.C.P.Tel. June 16th 1987

⁴²⁵ BBC WAC B213-002: Children's Programmes General Part 1 'BBC Television Children's Programmes and their Exploitation by BBC Enterprises', undated

⁴²⁶ 'Major boost for children's TV' *The Stage* October 18th 1990, 20

1992.⁴²⁷ The relationship between Enterprises and Children's had been formalised to the extent that it was in effect a semi-autonomous department. Although press reports locate them as separate units, the CDU and BBC Children's International may have been the same department; after the effective disappearance of the CDU, BBC Children's International retains its responsibility for developing animation. Furthermore, both units were also headed by Theresa Plummer-Andrews, who had accompanied Anna Home back to the BBC from TVS. However BBC Children's International differed from its predecessor in that while it still concentrated on developing animated productions like *Noddy* and *Albert the Fifth Musketeer*, it also moved definitively towards developing drama as a commercial opportunity, further emphasising the association between 'quality', 'classic drama', and commercial and corporate opportunity.

BBC Children's International seems not to have produced drama as an independent initiative; all drama production still involved BBC Children's as a production culture. However, it did set out to develop and facilitate the production of certain genres of children's television with a view to commercialisation, competition and increasingly convergence. The CDU was established with a remit 'to work across a range of areas in which it already had experience, such as programme distribution, co-production, video, publishing and character merchandising.' BBC Enterprises' James Arnold-Baker commented in the same article, 'Because we have businesses in all key areas of potential international multi-media marketing, we are able to sequence a property across all major rights areas.'⁴²⁸ The purpose of BBC Children's International, then, was more than the commercialisation of BBC children's

⁴²⁷ 'New unit for Kids' *The Stage* April 16th 1992, 22

⁴²⁸ 'Major boost for children's TV' *The Stage* October 18th 1990, 20

television, it was the corporatisation of BBC Children's. In some respects, it may be seen as the vertical integration of BBC Children's television from one department into an international brand, and then ultimately into a global platform.

Drama production thus responded to not only industrial and political pressures but developed its own production culture in response, and this production culture, while still cognisant of and responsive to the continuing particularised culture of BBC Children's, deployed a more globally aware production strategy. This divided duty emerged in the productions it chose to sponsor, produce and collaborate upon, such as *The Borrowers*, *My Friend Walter* and potentially *Torch* and *Moonacre*, both of which were international co-productions, and all of which were fantastic in mode and style. While public service values could be coded into fantasy dramas at a cultural, civic and cognitive development levels, the fantastic facilitated the foregrounding of a glossy, technologically advanced aesthetic, as it had done from the 1980s. Often too, the fantastic allowed for the production to be dislocated from its immediate historical and political milieu. This was reinforced by BBC Children's International's remit to fund children's drama through international co-production. While this had the effect of making productions less nationally and historically specific and thereby more easily culturally translatable, it also ran the risk of homogenising what made British children's television drama one of the few national public service broadcasting services for children in the world. In many respects, the work of BBC Children's International was the culmination of the shift begun under Barnes, using fantasy as a selling point. Unlike Barnes' tenure, however, under Home, weekday fantasy had been restored and was still being produced. This in effect created a dual production culture, both within BBC Children's and BBC Children's International

By the mid-1990s, certain new concepts of broadcasting and new media technologies were emerging and, perhaps more importantly, converging for children's television, encouraged by technological advances and the marketisation of the broadcasting landscape. Home video was acknowledged by the BBC as part of their commercial arm, and increasingly home computers were being used for both education and entertainment, with particular reference to children as consumers as Buckingham states.⁴²⁹ However, computing was also becoming a standard within broadcasting and television production itself and thereby shaping the genre of children's television fantasy. By the early 90s, BBC and ITV companies were already moving away from the purely physical and electronic effects to a more computer generated aesthetic, allowing for fantasy dramas like *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Earthfasts*, and *Five Children and It*.

Further formal changes were also ongoing, in response both to economic issues and the dwindling resources created by Producer Choice. By 1994, the Programme Strategy Review stated, 'Efforts have been concentrated on lighter material and have moved away from classic book adaptations except on Sundays.'⁴³⁰ In this respect, 'lighter' may be read in one of several ways, as a more economical drama production strategy, as more contemporary or as an analogue for drama for younger children. Certainly *Julia Jekyll and Harriet Hyde*, an entirely studio-bound comedy drama based on a schoolgirl whose monstrous transformation was facilitated by the use of a full-body suit and basic video effects, was undemanding in terms of narrative or aesthetic, and qualified in all above respects. Davies cites one eleven year old who states dismissively, '*Julia Jekyll and Harriet Hyde* is a bit rubbish!' However, it is worth noting

⁴²⁹ Buckingham *Children's Television in Britain*, 56

⁴³⁰ BBC WAC D220-008-004 'Programme Strategy Review: Children's Television Full Appendix December 1994'

that of the ‘new and successful series [which] have been developed’ those cited as ‘lighter’, *The Demon Headmaster*, *Julia Jekyll and Harriet Hyde*, *Agent Z and the Penguin from Mars*’ are all in the fantastic mode, and while they have literary association through adaptation or authorship, they lack the status of previous fantasy dramas.

However, Alastair McGown raises another possibility. In identifying the rise of the ‘so-called “comedy drama” which proliferated on both channels in the 1990s, McGown suggests that “[s]eries marketed and classed as “comedy drama” can be usefully counted at a surface level as “drama” and thus help bolster your drama index.’⁴³¹ These ‘comedy dramas’ may account for the increase in ‘lighter’ material. However, regardless of its literary quality, popularity of a production like *The Demon Headmaster* was indisputable. Davies stated in her article ‘Crazyspace’ that the first series was ‘a huge hit, gaining a 70% share of the child audience and beating even the popular soap opera *EastEnders* in the all-programme ratings for children’.⁴³² Anna Home stated for the Review that, facing financial pressure as efficiency drives accelerated, the BBC had been looking at ways to reduce drama costs through extending runs and ‘looking at different kinds of drama, that isn’t so lavish in terms of setting, numbers of characters, that sort of thing.’⁴³³

An interesting addendum however is that despite the longevity of *The Demon Headmaster* and *The Queen’s Nose* in response to viewer popularity, the same rationale was not necessarily allowed to pass for drama produced by BBC Children’s International. In a rather terse exchange, Anna Home writes to Alan Yentob about a proposed third series of *The Borrowers*.

⁴³¹ McGown and Docherty *The Hill and Beyond*, 231

⁴³² Davies ‘Crazyspace’, 394

⁴³³ Davies and O’Malley *Children and Television Drama*, 128

Grainne Marmion and I have talked at length about the possibilities of a third series of *The Borrowers*. My feelings and I understood Grainne's after discussion was as there is only one book left untouched which is one of the least good of all of them and, given the fact that we had to invent a very large amount of material to make this series work which caused comment and criticism from Mary Norton purists, we felt we should not start manufacturing what would be completely new material which would inevitably be repetitious in some way. I am a great believer in stopping when you're at the top which we certainly are with this series.⁴³⁴

Quality drama such as *The Borrowers* was therefore part of a nexus of literary authenticity and restraint; in short, of taste in the Bourdieuan sense. *The Queen's Nose*, however, as a 'lighter'⁴³⁵ adaptation from Dick King-Smith's children's book, was, as part of the weekday production culture, less subject to these constraints and could be used to 'create franchises of recognisable properties and to build up a significant number of episodes for packaged syndication sale abroad and on satellite.'⁴³⁶

Thus, while weekday production was becoming increasingly broad and economically achievable if aesthetically basic, 'quality' drama, most commonly channelled through BBC Children's International, remained narrow, constrained by concepts of quality, authenticity and taste. However, there was still room for fantasy dramas in the weekday schedules, as evidenced by the presence of *Century Falls*, which was neither

⁴³⁴ BBC WAC B091 Children's Programmes: Proposals Meetings & Comments Part 3 01/01/89-30/11/94 H.C.P.Tel. to Alan Yentob, January 17th 1994

⁴³⁵ BBC WAC D220-008-004, Programme Strategy Review: Children's Television Full Appendix December 1994', 36

⁴³⁶ McGown and Docherty *The Hill and Beyond*, 230

light nor basic, the potential appeal of which is examined hereafter.

By the time Home retired in 1996, despite seismic changes in British children's television culture and publicly expressed unease about the long-term effect these changes would have, BBC Children's television was more robust than ever and regarded as one of the world's foremost producers of children's television. However, the criteria and processes of production had changed forever. Children's BBC had tilted on its axis from an independent, departmentally contiguous production culture to new and precarious configurations of production according to institutional accountability, public service value and commercial global appeal.

Century Falls (BBC, 1993)

Century Falls was the follow-up to Russell T Davies' first successful children's television drama, *Dark Season*. Broadcast on Wednesdays between 17th February 1993 and 24th March 1993, it was significantly more challenging than many other contemporary series. Anna Home suggested of its production that she doubted that the BBC would make anything like that in the current era, and her view has some validity.⁴³⁷ *Century Falls* not only featured, unusually, a fat heroine but the narrative was driven by the idea that the elderly villagers of Century Falls could project a gestalt consciousness into being through their shared psychic abilities, thereby dooming their own children and any other children in the village to an early death. When Tess Hunter and her pregnant mother first arrive in the village of Century Falls, they are told that no children can survive there and the Hunters are advised to leave before the fate of the village overtakes them. Forty years before, the psychic villagers

⁴³⁷ Anna Home, interview with author, London, June 21st, 2013

had attempted to unite their powers into one form called Century but the attempt had been a disaster, leaving portions of the physical landscape scarred and haunted and the villagers unable to have children.

Century Falls was not Davies' first foray into children's television. He had, since the 1980s, been writing for various children's dramas, such as *Children's Ward* and *Breakfast Serials*, and had in 1991 written a sci-fi adventure serial *Dark Season*. While *Dark Season* had been witty, inventive and a little frightening, featuring a malevolent force of chaos in human form, Mr Eldritch, and a 'Devil-worshipping Nazi lesbian'⁴³⁸, *Century Falls* was far more challenging, suggesting a generic construction closer to horror than pure telefantasy. Anna Home, Head of BBC Children's at the time, stated in interview that the production was 'going out on a limb in a big way and [...] did cause a lot of fuss.'⁴³⁹ She said with admirable understatement that it was 'quite controversial'.⁴⁴⁰

The fuss and controversy was likely to have been caused by the narrative and aesthetics of *Century Falls*, which were more common to horror cinema than children's television. *Century Falls* both textually and aesthetically invokes horror, destabilising not only physical bodies and psyches within the text but also 'pushing the boundaries of children's television'⁴⁴¹ *Century Falls* was from the outset a generically complicated production. Press listings stated that it was a 'science fiction' serial but structurally and aesthetically it lent itself to a reading as fantasy. There was nothing at all of science about it; even its narrative denouement relied upon the triumph of faith over despair, youth over age. The fantastic was represented as a

⁴³⁸ Russell T. Davies 'Transmission was madness. Honestly.' *The Guardian* September 15th 2003 [<http://www.theguardian.com/media/2003/sep/15/channel4.gayrights>] (accessed January 7th 2016)

⁴³⁹ Anna Home, interview with author, London, June 21st, 2013

⁴⁴⁰ Anna Home, interview with author, London, June 21st, 2013

⁴⁴¹ David Richardson 'Russell T. Davies and the Village of the Damned' in *TVZone* Issue 68 July 1995, 31

village full of ageing psychics whose power had left scars on the physical landscape, which was itself a psychic repository of the village's history. Tess and her mother's status as outsiders is compounded when it becomes clear that the villagers share a psychic power, and that the village has kept this secret for centuries. "If you were born outside Century Falls," says Esme Harkness, a redoubtable old woman, "you're always an outsider," thus playing upon the idea of belonging and community being constructed and maintained through deliberate exclusion, in this case of the Hunters. This idea of social and temporal isolation is reinforced by the *mise en scene* of the Harknesses' village shop. As a nexus of exchange, it seems to have stalled in the 1950s at the same time as the disaster that killed several villagers and effectively sterilised the village: the milk is still delivered in bottles, the shop is based on idea of counter service, and there is an old-fashioned post office attached.

However, the idea of correspondence with the outside world is regarded with fear. Century Falls' original attempt to implant their shared consciousness into a human form had been so that they could create a guardian against modernity, science and discovery. Following their abortive attempt to create a form with their shared powers, no children have survived in Century Falls, which is now insular, elderly and haunted. This is reinforced by the location shooting with a BBC Outside Broadcast Unit. Filmed primarily on location in Langthwaite, North Yorkshire, the small and isolated village and its surrounding landscape was a familiar space from British horror movies, like *An American Werewolf in London*, *The Wicker Man* and *Blood on Satan's Claw*. In addition, the narrative invests several of the surrounding features as repositories of feeling. The Falls of the title act as a shared memory; when Tess falls into the pool beneath the falls, one of the characters

screams, 'She's broken the waterfall!' Another node of psychic/physical memory is out in the woods 'where May takes Mrs Hunter to where they'd had a bonfire of old children's clothes and toys and she remembers.'⁴⁴² The conflation of the physical and psychic landscapes articulates *Century Falls* into what Peter Hutchings describes as 'a landscape suffused with a profound and sometimes apocalyptic anxiety; it is also a landscape of profound dispossession and vacancy.'⁴⁴³

Consequently, generically and textually, *Century Falls* is constructed not only as a space of isolation but a space of horror encoded into the landscape itself, out of which old trauma can be pulled. Aesthetically and formally, the isolation of *Century Falls* is reinforced by an establishing shot that focuses upon the setting sun before panning back down into the valley and the dark village, moving from open space to enclosure, light to dark, and thus prefiguring the loss of faith that has haunted the villagers. Repeated crane shots constantly re-situate the characters as small figures within the landscape.

However, the real site of horror is not just the landscape but the female body. Perhaps unsurprisingly for a text that is located around the trauma of lost children, the pregnant body of Mrs Hunter is the key site of horror, and lends itself to the most overt deployment of the grotesque. When the villagers decide, under the influence of the malevolent Century, to try and once again unite their consciousness in a form, they decide that the ideal host is the shared physical and psychic space of Mrs Hunter and her unborn child. This is made explicit through dialogue between Tess and Esme Harkness as a possessed Mrs Hunter steps into the local temple to sacrifice her unborn child to Century. Tess asks, 'If the child becomes Century, what happens to Mum?' Esme replies, 'The unformed mind will need

⁴⁴² David Richardson 'Russell T. Davies and the Village of the Damned' in *TVZone* Issue 68 July 1995, 31

⁴⁴³ Peter Hutchings 'Uncanny Landscapes in British Film and Television' in *Visual Culture in Britain* 5:2 2004, 31

an intelligence to sustain it. That's your mother, Tess.' 'Both of them?' says Tess, horrified, 'Joined together? Always?' and Esme confirms grimly, 'Century will be a true abomination: two lives bound as one, mother and child, fused.'

In an interview with *TVZone*, Russell T. Davies stated, '[The BBC] said at script stage they would probably cut all the lines about the foetus being fused to the mother. I thought that was real horror, dressed up under different names. It was a possession story. The producer said, "What we actually need is more of this Rosemary's Baby stuff!"'⁴⁴⁴ Thus, not only is the serial rooted in English horror often encoded into the land and the impenetrable, insular social relationships of remote communities, it organises horror through the more widely recognised structure of motherhood as monstrous, a common motif in horror cinema.

Davies's description of *Century Falls* as a 'possession story' structures the narrative and any interiority in the serial. Matt Hills describes 'possession horror' as offering 'many instances of the interplay between object-directed emotion (experienced where the possessive force is 'housed' in one specific body) and objectless anxiety, where the possessive force exceeds any one body/object and hence potentially saturates the mise-en-scene.'⁴⁴⁵ These two directions for horror are present in *Century Falls*, in both the mother-child relationship, the intrusive psychic connection shared by the villagers, and in the landscape itself, reinforcing the folk horror reading. The village of Century Falls itself is a geographical landscape overlaid by the psychological trauma of its inhabitants.

The serial's recurrent thematics of bodily and psychic penetration, dystopian social structure, and constant surveillance all construct the text as one in which horror is

⁴⁴⁴ David Richardson 'Russell T. Davies and the Village of the Damned' in *TVZone* Issue 68 July 1995, 31

⁴⁴⁵ Matt Hills, *The Pleasures of Horror* (London & New York: Continuum, 2005), 27

overt, and which pushes the boundaries of children's television. It has been a long-held commonplace that television cannot sustain the horror genre, unable in the absence of cinema's scope or literature's subjectivity to create an affect for a domestic medium. This assumed impossibility becomes compounded in the case of children's television: horror was seen not only as antithetical to children's programming but immoral. The IBA received a multitude of letters of complaints from Christians about *Dramarama* episodes such as 'Mr Stabs' and 'The Exorcism of Amy'. Consequently, the generic inflection of a children's drama as horror might be seen as a hazardous proposition, leaving the department open to criticism and the audience open to affect they might not be able to cognitively process. Furthermore, the horror of the production was not leavened by common tropes or comedy but was located around the destabilisation of boundaries, of time, of identity, and of bodies, and absence.

However, I suggest that, in contradistinction to Peirse's notion of the textual horror being developed through 'an apparent disregard for political correctness coupled with a lack of concern over possible negative audience reactions and an increasing propensity for adult themes', these very attributes may work to construct what Perry Nodelman calls a 'shadow text' of British children's television. *Century Falls* is indicative of the evolution of children's television both as a form and a shared history, having been constructed initially very much in the vein of *Children of the Stones*; early drafts focused upon 'Professor Llewellyn and his assistant, Shankha, who were researching a stone circle with the help of a woman [...] who can read the Borlase text on megalithic stones.'⁴⁴⁶ In their examination of *TV Horror*, Jowett and Abbott draw links between historical trends in horror and fantasy and suggest that

⁴⁴⁶ David Richardson 'Russell T. Davies and the Village of the Damned' in *TVZone* Issue 68 July 1995, 30

‘a chilling drama like *Children of the Stones* reworks British folk horror like *The Wicker Man*.’⁴⁴⁷ I want to suggest that *Century Falls* evolves out of these productive and shared histories of horror and telefantasy, and consequently constructs itself not just as children’s fantasy drama but an accumulation of British television fantasy drama. Davies’ fondness for and knowledge of children’s television fantasy has subsequently emerged in his work as *Doctor Who* show runner (2005-2010), as executive producer on *The Sarah Jane Adventures* (CBBC, 2007-2012) and in *Wizards vs Aliens* (CBBC, 2012), which have all referenced the canon of British children’s television drama to date and which have developed British children’s television drama even further as a discourse and a dramatic form which can destabilise comfortable orthodoxies.

Children’s ITV, 1990-94

The 1990 Broadcasting Act was more immediately damaging to the ITV companies, resulting in the infamous ‘franchise affair’ of 1992. The Act had made good on the threats in Broadcasting in the 1990s to reform the ITV system in its entirety. As a consequence, the ITA ‘was no longer in charge of the national network of transmitters, and was unable to view and vet programmes in advance or to dictate schedules’⁴⁴⁸, regulatory responsibilities which they had held since 1964. However, most damagingly of all, the ITV companies franchises were from 1992 put out to tender not on criteria of purely public service as previously but in an auction in which the highest bid would win the day, a process Crisell describes as ‘an aleatory affair with an element of farce’.⁴⁴⁹ Those who did win franchises were also freed of the obligation to maintain production facilities. This

⁴⁴⁷ Jowett and Abbott *TV Horror*, 27

⁴⁴⁸ Johnson and Turnock *ITV Cultures*, 27

⁴⁴⁹ Crisell *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*, 236

meant not just the loss of the regulation of output by a body external to the ITV companies but the potential loss of regionality and original production. In the face of an initial large outlay of money for the franchise and the need for a swift return on the investment, why would broadcasters want to make programmes that did not make a profit or which required production overheads? After some vigorous lobbying by the IBA and ITV companies, the government conceded several changes to the Bill in the committee stage, including ‘a new statutory requirement for children’s and religious programmes, and a significant bolstering of regional requirements (CQT, 1990, PP. 4-5)’.⁴⁵⁰ It seemed that several aspects of the ITV structure which had perpetuated children’s television production within the companies had been spared the axe: regionality, federal competition and an emphasis upon delivering PSB as a defining feature of contracts. In addition, for the first time ever, children’s television production was statutory within ITV. It seemed that things were not as bad as they could have been.

However, there were from the outset several blows to children’s production cultures. In the franchise round itself, as McGown notes, with the loss of TVS to Meridian and the drastic restructuring of HTV after bad contract negotiations, [c]hildren’s television had lost two great servants.’⁴⁵¹ Thames Television had also, controversially, lost their London franchise to Carlton at the same time, and though the company continued to make programmes through diversified independent production companies, like Tetra Films who remade *The Tomorrow People* for Nickelodeon, their longstanding children’s department was lost as well. Meridian would continue to make some children’s television, including *Zzzap!* and *Wizadora*, and even some fantasy drama, such as the 1993

⁴⁵⁰ Peter Goodwin *Television Under the Tories* (London: BFI, 1998), 106

⁴⁵¹ McGown and Docherty *The Hill and Beyond*, 229

Eye of the Storm, but it was a fillip compared to the previous dedicated children's output of Southern and Television South thereafter.

Further aftershocks to the Broadcasting Act were to follow. In the wake of the expensive contract negotiations and a loophole in the Broadcasting Act which opened up ownership to European companies, ITV franchise holders started lobbying for the relaxation of the ownership rules for the companies themselves. In 1993, Heritage Secretary, Peter Brook agreed to relax the regulations so that ITV companies could own two of the large franchises, except the two London franchises. 'In the following months, Carlton took over Central, Granada took over LWT, and MAI which already owned Meridian, took over Anglia.'⁴⁵² A loss of regionality and production diversity was inevitable, despite assurances that the merged companies would commit to regional representation, and was only compounded further when ITV moved towards a Network Centre. Responsibility for commissioning and scheduling devolved to a Controller of Network Children's and Daytime, and ultimately the Network Children's Subcommittee became moribund when Dawn Airey was appointed to the post in 1993. Airey might not have stayed long in post, leaving the following year to become Channel Four's Arts and Entertainment Editor, but a press article about her Channel Four appointment suggested that she had changed the face of Children's ITV by moving it away from reality drama to a more fantasy oriented output.⁴⁵³ Another interview with *The Stage* stated 'she wanted to try and broaden the base of the fictional offerings from her area,' and Airey declared, 'I am interested in more action adventure, more thrillers, more fantasy drama.'⁴⁵⁴ This gesture towards genre suggested that Children's ITV might be a viable production

⁴⁵² Goodwin *Television under the Tories*, 120

⁴⁵³ Rachel Murrell 'The new day's Dawn' *The Guardian* August 15th 1994

⁴⁵⁴ "'Fantasy" forecast for Children's ITV' *The Stage* December 9th 1993, 20

culture for fantasy drama despite the changes, but the multichannel era had started to bite and those remaining children's producers at ITV companies were now facing more competition than ever before. Lewis Rudd's description of the Network Centre as an 'independent dictatorship', however, suggested that there might still have been some tensions about the new structure.⁴⁵⁵

By 1993, the British broadcasting landscape had changed irrevocably. Nickelodeon had started broadcasting in the UK, as a UK-oriented franchise, and The Children's Channel had been broadcasting since 1986. The independent companies were also competing for space on the ITV network via the 25% quota, which the 1990 Broadcasting Act had made law. Competition was no longer merely between the ITV companies for network access, and with the BBC for audiences, but with every other broadcaster on the British airwaves for the right to exist. While Children's ITV persisted as a production culture until 2006, producers and executives within Independent Television argued that 1990 Broadcasting Act had been the death knell for ITV. Denis Forman, previously of Granada, told *The Guardian* in 2003 that 'ITV was really changed by Thatcher - the 1990 Broadcasting Act undermined that particular kind of public service broadcasting, which was all about producing high quality programming. It introduced [through a franchise auction system] the economic imperative.'⁴⁵⁶ *The New York Times* stated that 'For Stuart Prebble of the Campaign for Quality Television, the White Paper was "a detailed epitaph for the television which has been the envy of the world.'"⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁵ Davies and O'Malley *Children and Television Drama*, 150

⁴⁵⁶ Maggie Brown 'What we want from the new ITV' *The Guardian* October 13th 2003

⁴⁵⁷ James Atlas 'Thatcher Puts a Lid On Censorship in Britain' *The New York Times Magazine* March 5th 1989 [<http://www.nytimes.com/1989/03/05/magazine/thatcher-puts-a-lid-on-censorship-in-britain.html?pagewanted=all>] (accessed January 5th 2016)

As the public service values and company identities were whittled away, so too, almost inevitably, was children's drama. In similar fashion to the BBC during this period, the economic imperative can perhaps be best seen in ITV children's drama in the separation of comedy drama and serious drama. In his précis of 1990s children's television drama, *The Hill and Beyond*, McGown points to the rise of comedy drama as 'more to do with marketing spin' than dramatic genres.⁴⁵⁸ This was supported by the NSCS minutes which suggests that 'it was felt that comedy drama and serious drama should be separated out and that a balance of each should be sought.'⁴⁵⁹ Those dramas listed as serious new offers were a proposed adaptation of *The Borrowers* by Central and *Emlyn's Moon* by HTV, both of which were fantasy drama adaptations, an adaptation of historical epic *Blood Feud* by Rosemary Sutcliff produced by Thames, and *Runaway Bay* written by Anthony Horowitz and set in Jamaica. By contrast, the returning comedy dramas included *Palace Hill* (Central, series 3), *Mike and Angelo* (series 3), *T-Bag* (series 7) and *Pace in Space* (Granada), all of which were wholly studio-based. The construction of comedy drama seems, in accordance with McGown's opinion, to be an economic exercise rather than a generic or formal description, and as with the BBC re-articulation of drama, 'lighter' fare. Another production trend similar to those occurring at BBC was, as Lewis Rudd argued, the re-commissioning on grounds of popularity where previously federalism had encouraged shorter runs.⁴⁶⁰ In similar fashion to the BBC, it seems, ITV companies were also developing dual production cultures operating around international co-production and weekday schedules. Co-productions had been popular in the 1980s but changes to the way the Levy worked in 1986 meant that they

⁴⁵⁸ McGown and Docherty *The Hill and Beyond*, 230

⁴⁵⁹ IBA Archive File 133/9/1 'Minutes from Children's SubGroup' 21 and 22 November 1989, 13

⁴⁶⁰ Davies and O'Malley *Children and Television Drama*, 142

had become less economically interesting (hence perhaps HTV West's move into hotels and data management). However, they were still a route into the production of children's drama which might otherwise not have been viable. Rudd commented ruefully that Central had almost closed a deal with Disney to produce *The Borrowers* but 'Disney Channel mucked us around so much that in the end we lost our slot and the BBC put up all the money for it.'⁴⁶¹ BBC Children's International subsequently developed the property to great acclaim. The paucity of resources for drama production in the multichannel era was becoming ever more pressing. In 1996, Rudd had told the authors of the review that, '[a]t the moment ITV can afford £120,000 or a £150,000 for an episode of children's drama but if there are loads of channels... maybe everyone will be able to afford £30,000 for an episode but nobody will be able to afford £150,000'.⁴⁶² After forty years of making ends meet, both BBC and ITV children's producers and departments were at risk of being priced out of the market.

While some ITV children's producers would go on making children's drama until 2006, for some the 1990 Broadcasting Act spelled the end of specialised and dedicated production cultures of children's television which had built up over decades. In January 1994, Central Independent Television was bought by Carlton and its regional operations rationalised, making *Wail of the Banshee* one of the last children's dramas to be produced by Central as an ITV company and one of the strongest ITV producers of fantasy drama of the previous decade.

⁴⁶¹ Davies and O'Malley *Children and Television Drama*, 148

⁴⁶² *Ibid*, 159

Wail of the Banshee (Central Independent Television, 1992)

Wail of the Banshee was a seven-part serial by Central Independent Television, filmed in studio and on location in Nottingham, the franchise area for Central. Its four child protagonists, Jubilee, Jason, Matt and Diz, were local child actors, drawn from the Central Junior Television Workshop, set up by the franchise holder in the 1980s. Thus, *Wail of the Banshee* was not only a children's drama but in many respects a regional drama. Fantasy operated on several levels within the narrative: the children's guardians and helpers were Merlin (Peter Angelides) and a Samurai King Arthur played by David Yip, accompanied by a depressed Boggart (David Barber). On the opposing side were the Banshee, an alien race 'from deep space', who were using the human race as 'lab rats', the leader of whom was Fay Morgan (Susie Blake), most often seen with slicked back hair, bright red lipstick and in a man's business suit.

Despite production and narrative being located in Nottingham, *Wail of the Banshee* foregrounds British children in a global and distinctly premillennial narrative. The alien Banshee of the title and their invasion of Earth constitutes a double threat: they cause global warming and ecological disasters as part of their scientific experiments upon earth and mankind. However, the more pressing danger is the appeal of their cold-blooded rationality, an appeal which the alien Banshee explicitly extend to Jubilee Jones, one of the four protagonists. Throughout the seven part serial, the villainous Fay Morgan attempts to lure Jubilee over to the side of the Banshee, offering pure rationality, scientific objectivity, and the quest for knowledge. In many respects, Jubilee's desire for order and logic derives from her parents' separation and her father's abandonment. Disappointment in and disillusionment with adults and particularly parents is writ large in *Banshee*: Fay points out that

while Jubilee loves her mother (who is, like all the other parents, conspicuous by her textual absence) she is also embarrassed by her, thinking her stupid. When Death, an overly-friendly psychopath played with East End relish by Alan Corduner, is recruited by the Banshee, he reveals Matt's resentment of his radical environmentalist father and his desire to be free of him, although Matt rejects Death's suggestion that his father should have a little accident with a gun.

Situated in a binarial discourse of regionalism and global effect, *Banshee* derives from several key historical impulses: what McGown describes as 'part of a growing "green movement" of children's drama',⁴⁶³ along with productions like *Oasis* and *Eye of the Storm* and, from further afield, animation like *Captain Planet and the Planeteers*. However, it also developed from the 1980s' structure and ethos of Central Independent Television and its innovations in children's television. In the early 1980s, with ATV's restructuring into Central Independent Television, no longer under Sir Lew Grade's control, a new base of operations was opened up in Nottingham, in order to decentre what had previously been seen as too great a focus on Birmingham. Not only were Central operating production out of Nottingham but they also developed their famous Central Junior Television Workshop there initially. As Sue Nott, former producer for Central and BBC, describes it, the Workshop originated out of youth theatres and drama groups in the area, and was originally intended to facilitate the casting of child performers without needing to go to London or transport the children to Nottingham. However, as Nott states, Central 'quickly discovered that not only was it a very useful resource for casting but it was also a useful resource for exploring ideas

⁴⁶³ McGown and Docherty *The Hill and Beyond*, 242

through discussion, through improvisation, and that was actually how *Your Mother Wouldn't Like It* came about.⁴⁶⁴

Your Mother Wouldn't Like It was a hugely successful sketch show, performed by the children of the Television Workshop. The Workshop, in addition, contributed to the form and narrative through improvisation and working with scriptwriters. It developed into several series and even developed a spin-off, *Palace Hill*, another comedy and a parody of *Grange Hill*. However, the central purpose of the Workshop was still as a casting pool and not simply for economic reasons. Sue Nott stated in interview that Lewis Rudd, then Controller of Children's at Central, 'wanted an authentic Midlands feel to the dramas that he was commissioning.'⁴⁶⁵ This meant that the children would represent the Midlands both in regional accent and ethnic diversity, a factor Lewis Rudd also highlighted in the broadcasting press. As a result, Central children's output could represent the regional directly as well as textually.

There is also however a strong regional representation of Nottingham and its environs within *Wail of the Banshee*. Although Nott recollected that it was largely shot in studio, there's a strong regional location through outside broadcast filming within the narrative. This included such disparate and recognisable locations as the Greens Windmill and the newly built Centerparcs, including one extended and vaguely ridiculous chase sequence down the water slides, involving a mermaid, a sword and an alien. This location filming seems to have been a company strategy, according to Lewis Rudd in 1994. In addressing the disparity between engineering and production expectations of television production, he stated that at Central, Engineering had built 'these enormous studios in Nottingham. If they had asked people in drama, certainly in

⁴⁶⁴ Sue Nott, interview with author, London, August 16th 2013

⁴⁶⁵ Sue Nott, interview with author, London, August 16th 2013

children's programmes, education and features, "are you going to make studio based programmes?", the reply would have been "no, we are going to make everything on location".⁴⁶⁶

This production strategy of location filming was perhaps unsurprising given the move to Nottingham, which Central had undertaken to better represent its franchise area in response to ITA and public displeasure with the Birmingham-centric focus of their previous broadcasting. However, it also served a generic purpose: Rudd stated in interview, 'I always had this underlying idea, as I said to you before, that fantasy works best when it's against a realistic background'⁴⁶⁷, a view that he shared with Anna Home, and which may account for the increased amount of location filming across their departments.

Nottingham was therefore made part of the continuum between reality and fantasy, as well as the local and the global, negotiating both modality judgements and concepts of citizenship and multiculturalism for the child audience. Local features were also used to advance the narrative directly. The smoke stacks outside Nottingham were made a part of the eco-conscious narrative when Fay attempts to create a nuclear meltdown and thus the smoke stacks become a sign not of pollution but of safety and reassurance. This, in conjunction with the narrative construction of global warning and pollution as the result of alien experimentation upon the planet, is actually reassuring rather than consciousness-raising, restating an idea of technology and science as neutral. In an exchange with Diz, Merlin articulates global warming as part of a science fiction discourse rather than scientific.

Merlin: The world is virtually finito, right? Rainforests nearly gone, oceans diseased, pollution everywhere.

⁴⁶⁶ Davies and O'Malley *Children and Television Drama*, 145

⁴⁶⁷ Lewis Rudd, phone Interview with author, July 10th 2013

Diz: And don't forget the hole in the ozone layer.

Merlin: Through which the atmosphere of this planet escapes, making a hideous noise named by a certain tabloid as the wail of the banshee.

Diz: Yeah, that's right.

Merlin: And you think this is all of the fault of humanity?

Diz: Well, our own stupid fault, yeah!

Merlin: Yes, and no. Yes, you are the muckiest people ever to hold a timeshare on Earth and no, it's not strictly your fault. You've been bamboozled, misled, confused.

Jubilee: Like you're trying to do to us?

Merlin: No. Just open the shutters of your mind, Jubilee.

Jubilee: So whose fault is it?

Merlin: The Banshee.

Boggart: Are they back?!

Merlin: Yes, Boggart, they are.

This construction of ecological issues is therefore less about the actual realities of global warming and more about community and personal responsibility. The character development throughout the serial was not about global activism but individual self-actualisation: Diz whose brain is 'all marmalade and feathers' has to learn to concentrate and Jubilee, whose brain is the loneliest place and who throughout the serial is tempted to join the Banshee's scientific experiments, learns to care about others. Thus, unlike other ecological children's dramas during this period like *Eye of the Storm* and *Oasis*, *Wail of the Banshee*'s focus is upon the fantastic as personal and social development rather than global citizenship.

Ultimately, *Wail of the Banshee* was largely overlooked at the time of transmission and forgotten since, and Sue Nott attributes this to bad scheduling by the Subcommittee:

The ITV Network Committee had decided, for some reason I never understood, to try to put all their children's drama out earlier in the afternoon, at 3.30, 4.00pm. Lewis, quite understandably, got quite anxious about the melodramatic, darker type of stuff. This was the time of the ITV Network Committee where they decided amongst themselves what the schedule was going to be and when things were going to go out, and they all got very nervous about it [Wail]. I was furious at the time, as producer, but they buried it on a Monday at about 3.30pm, 4 o'clock and because it went out in April to May and it was a 7-episode serial, it got clobbered by three bank holidays: the Easter bank holiday, the first May bank holiday and the last May bank holiday. So with the best will in the world, it was just impossible for the audience to follow the plot. It wasn't completely unsuccessful but it died a bit of a death and never got re-commissioned, so that's why it's become kind of a cult classic.⁴⁶⁸

It is possible to speculate that the move to an earlier schedule for children's drama may reflect Johnson and Turnock's statement that in the wake of the 1990 Broadcasting Act, 'a number of ITV's mandated 'public service' programmes (such as religious programming and news were moved from primetime into less ratings friendly slots.'⁴⁶⁹ If the ITV companies wanted to expand the afternoon programming for adults as a more lucrative space, a move which has certainly developed over the last ten years, making the start of children's

⁴⁶⁸ Sue Nott, interview with author, London, August 16th 2013

⁴⁶⁹ Johnson and Turnock *ITV Cultures*, 28

programmes earlier, regardless of content or appropriate scheduling, might have been one way to do it. Regardless of motive, the schedule shift meant that *Wail of the Banshee*, one of the last few dramas produced by Central as a regional company, passed unnoticed.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the 1990 broadcasting Act had long-standing and severe effects for ITV companies and the BBC. Compounded by the increasing proliferation of channels in the multichannel era, widespread competitive strategies put production cultures at risk, culminating in the loss of several ITV Children's channels, and according to Denis Forman, the breakdown of the ITV system as a whole. *Wail of the Banshee* is, in many respects, a punctuation mark in the production of fantasy drama within ITV: other productions such as *Harry's Mad* and *Bernard's Watch* would follow but the early 1990s saw the end of several established and productive concepts of ITV as a public service broadcaster.

Similarly, the BBC was having to adapt to new economies and efficiency drives, imposed both externally through funding shortfalls and internally through strategies like John Birt's Producer's Choice. They responded by developing semi-commercial relationships, formed in the 1980s, even further, and in effect creating a dual production culture of weekday and event programming. However, as *Century Falls* demonstrates, even within the weekday schedules, BBC fantasy drama was still a form which was infinitely mutable and could contribute new values, new audiences, and new inflections of drama to television.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to recover a history of the fantastic within children's television drama between 1950 and 1994, and to reassess its place in the canon and discourse of British children's television drama as a whole. Due to the broad historical period of the thesis' remit, this was necessarily an 'archaeological'⁴⁷⁰ endeavour in television studies as much as a historical one. As a longitudinal study of an overlooked canon of children's television drama and the productions, modes and aesthetics which have represented the unreal within it, it has demonstrated that fantasy drama has been part of the children's schedules since they were first established. However, as this thesis has shown, these production, mode and aesthetics have responded historically to institutional structures and ethos. Concomitantly, these modes and aesthetics have reflected ideological and production cultures, and by corollary the way that the child audience was imagined and theorised by broadcasters, academics and British society.

These arguments were contextualised through the introduction and literature review, and by the subsequent five chapters of historical research on children's fantasy drama across the regulated duopoly between 1950 and 1994. In addition, case studies of fantasy dramas by both the BBC and ITV companies from throughout the latter part of the 20th century drew together textual analysis, archival research and production background to situate these productions historically.

Chapter 1 drew upon the early history of the BBC Children's Programmes to delineate how children's drama developed as a production culture within the BBC. More particularly, it

⁴⁷⁰ John Caughie 'Before the Golden Age: Early Television Drama' in *Popular Television in Britain* ed. John Corner (London: BFI, 1991), 24-25

examined fantasy drama was used during the brief but formative tenure of Cecil Madden as Head of the department, but then receded beneath the weight of other genres when Freda Lingstrom was unexpectedly appointed. In the face of the emphasis given to Lingstrom's previous role in BBC Schools, the distrust of Madden's show business associations by BBC management, and the move to a greater proportion of mimetic serials, such as classic adaptations of *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* and *Heidi*, fantasy drama suffered a decline in response to changing understandings of the BBC's role as a public service broadcaster and the needs of the child audience. Fantasy subsequently became more easily constrained than it had been under Madden, through different modes such as puppetry and single plays such as *Whistle for Silence*.

The second chapter of this thesis examined the introduction of commercial television in what would come to be called the 'regulated duopoly'. Drawing from institutional documents, it documented the changes which competition made to production culture, style and form at the BBC, where children's drama capacity was removed in 1963 and the children's production subsequently assigned to the new Family Programmes Department. This initiated a period during which children's television drama was not produced by a children's department, and there was no drama transmitted during the children's weekday schedules until a Children's department was reinstituted in 1968 and drama output recommenced two years later.⁴⁷¹ Similarly, using archival evidence from the ITA/IBA archive at the University of Bournemouth and contemporary sources, it made a case for an ITV production culture of home-originated children's drama that was more consistent and expansive than commonly conceived. While the popularity and predominance of American and Americanised productions was

⁴⁷¹ Davies and O'Malley *Children and Television Drama*, 144

inarguable, this thesis argued that the critical, institutional and popular attention paid to them was disproportionate to their presence, and overshadowed the small but sustained production cultures of the early ITV companies. These production cultures were strengthened by the increasing fortunes of ITV, the opprobrium heaped on ITV programming by the Pilkington Report and the subsequent transfer of regulation and transmission control to the ITA, and resulted in a determined and persistent campaign by the ITA to improve the ITV children's output. This was particularly significant in terms of drama production and genre.

Chapter 3 focused upon the consolidation of children's drama production both by the BBC and ITV companies, and the development of a putative 'Golden Age' of children's television. Anna Home, later Head of BBC Children's, described it as a 'very sumptuous time' to work in children's television, characterised by the 'freedom to experiment'.⁴⁷² BBC Children's production staff embarked upon a determined and entrepreneurial stealth campaign to regain departmental drama capacity, vigorously supported by Monica Sims, then head of department. As a result, a canon of children's television drama began to develop throughout the 1970s of adaptations, contemporary and historical drama, and fantasy dramas to which valuable time and resources were committed. *The Changes*, shot primarily on location originally had a planned 24-week shoot.⁴⁷³ Similarly, further resources and budgets were being committed to children's television fantasy drama in ITV. These productions were driven in part by expanded broadcasting schedules from 1972 and continuing efforts by the ITA to regulate and improve children's television. Children's drama however increased still skirted the edges of

⁴⁷² Buckingham et al *Children's Television in Britain*, 33

⁴⁷³ BBC WAC T2/294/1, 'Shooting schedule for *The Changes*' Unknown to Anna Home, undated

underproduction at times, and therefore regional companies saw it as a useful way to gain access to the national network. As a consequence, ITV children's television drama throughout the 1970s developed through a discourse of intra-company competition, quality and regionalism, and fantasy was a productive and profitable mode by which to capture airtime and audiences.

The 1980s, however, were a period during which the concept of public service broadcasting was being contested and even reviled in favour of a state-sanctioned policy of increased competition and commercialism. Chapter Four locates children's drama within this decade of industrial and cultural change, tracing it through the early 1980s during which radicalism was still possible and post-Peacock Committee, in the wake of which sweeping changes to both the BBC's and ITV's production cultures occurred and forced broadcasters to reconsider their commercial viability. As a result, both broadcasters within the regulated duopoly campaigned to maintain the funding and regulatory structures which had underpinned their programme-making since the 1960s. The introduction of cable and satellite, as well as the imposition of the 25% independent quota, moved the production of children's drama towards a model of production which was as much enterprise as public service broadcasting, as seen in the global pre-selling of the *Chronicles of Narnia* prior to its production.

Finally, Chapter 5 assessed the effect of the structural and political changes of the 1980s, and the resulting 1990 Broadcasting Act, upon the production of children's television drama in the 1990s. Major shifts in legislation, industry, technology, and broadcaster ethos meant that both halves of the regulated duopoly would be altered in perpetuity. At the BBC, the move towards an internal market, or Producer Choice, alongside the push towards the global market meant that a dual

production culture developed within BBC Children's, one still resolutely departmental and the other a collaborative relationship with commercial arm BBC Enterprises, formalised in the 1990s as BBC Children's International. However, even within the departmental production culture, fantasy dramas were still having to renegotiate specifically child-centred values and the need to attract broader audiences. ITV companies were also facing political and institutional change, following the 1990 Broadcasting Act's disastrous move to 'highest bidder' franchise auctions rather than contract negotiations built upon the public service requirements of universality, regionalism and quality. The companies' long-standing status and responsibilities were further eroded by the relaxation of ownership regulations, which meant that by 1994 several franchise holders had been swallowed up by other ITV companies. In addition, the centralisation of ITV at Network Centre and the reassignment of children's scheduling and regulation to a Controller of Children's and Daytime meant that children's television drama production was losing the federal structure which had created its precarious but innovative and demotic production ecology.

Future research

The study of children's fantasy drama raises several key research questions: what is the purpose of children's television? Who is the child viewer? What are their needs and limitations? How do they differentiate between television and real life; fantasy and the quotidian? What affect and cognition does the fantastic create for them? Ultimately, is children's television drama more about the adults who make it? If some of these questions remain unresolved, it is perhaps an indication of the epistemological impossibility of this knowledge to begin with.

While some answers can be elucidated from research and archival evidence, much else is rationalised rather than explained, and given the historical contingency and theoretical nature of some of these concepts, that is perhaps as much as this thesis can hope to accomplish. However, there are other more productive and concrete areas which could be addressed in future research which this thesis has not been able to incorporate into its remit or word count. In examining the fantasy drama over forty years, it has been necessary to elide the other elements of the drama ‘balance’. Valuable research might be done for example on the development of original, contemporary dramas from the 1970s, or the use of adaptations as a continuing and profitable strand of children’s drama. In pursuing such research, further archival evidence of the sustained use of literary collaboration might be found in the Seven Stories archive in Newcastle, which holds collections of children’s authors’ papers including drafts for BBC and ITV adaptations, correspondence and original screenplays. Further interviews with authors such as Alan Garner, Peter Dickinson, and Jacqueline Wilson about adaptation could provide valuable information about the relationships between literature and television, as could interviews with notable adapters of literature, like Julia Jones (*Tom’s Midnight Garden*) and Jenny McDade (*SuperGran*, *Archer’s Goon*).

Another potential avenue for research into children’s television as yet unaddressed would be a more developed history of ITV children’s programming. While the ITA/IBA archive documents the regulation and scheduling of children’s programming, it lacks the production documents which access to the ITV archives might provide and which, as Johnson and Turnock suggest, would yield a more holistic view of the, up till now, mostly obscured production cultures. While interviews with industrial professionals have provided vital information about

the production cultures which created children's television for the ITV network, this has been by necessity a limited and contingent perspective which archival research could offer. Another more 'archaeological' endeavour would be a more complete recovery of early children's drama on ITV as a more conclusive counter-argument to the popular conception of the 1950s service as wholly American or Americanised. Access to a collection like the Associated Rediffusion archive at the BFI Library could produce some invaluable and original research.

Despite the efforts of this thesis, much of British children's television history remains undiscovered and the field would benefit from further sustained and expanded research.

Children's television fantasy drama, 1950-1994

In conclusion, while the production of television drama and its generic iterations can be historicised through industrial and cultural influences, as this thesis has shown the use of genre has also been inflected by historical constructions of the child audience, the perception of which has been the primary organising structure of British children's television.

Understanding audiences at all, as Ang and Hartley assert, been labour-intensive and theoretically complex but, as established by Davies and Buckingham, research with children is even more methodically and ethically awkward, due to the authority structures inherent in the adult/child, researcher/viewer relationship and the opacity of the child subject. These communication difficulties are compounded further by the developing literacies and epistemological understanding of child viewers. These are taken account of in both Davies' and Buckingham's work but the results highlight the fact that children's understanding of narrative, genre and television is not only emergent but often ingenious and fantastic in its own right.

Indeed, their reasoning is not necessarily wrong or incomplete but wholly child-centric. Buckingham thus discovered that genre for children is less likely to correspond to the traditional ideas of types with which adult audiences engage as part of a generic model and relationship. Instead, children categorise television programming through alternate models that they create individually and socially, such as humour, action, and glamour, and attempt to create genre and explanations on their own terms.

Fantasy necessarily is therefore affected both by children's understanding of genre and of what is 'real'. Hodge and Tripp's examination of these 'modality judgements', and children's emotional and cognitive responses to a media text is affected by these. As Hodge and Tripp note, *Fangface*, a cartoon about a teenage werewolf, does not necessarily frighten children because they are aware that it is a cartoon and therefore delaminated from everyday life. However, fantasy dramas often complicate both reality and modality. If we consider the *Chronicles of Narnia*, and 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' particularly, animation and blue-screen effects are sutured into the live-action narrative to suggest that the narrative and aesthetics are seamless (see Chapter Four). Rupture may be indicated by the texture of the effects but their presence in and through the videotape infers an attempt at an integrated approach, one which has progressed in terms of complicating modality and ontology since the introduction of computer generated imagery. Likewise in *A Traveller in Time*, formal editing destabilises the difference between historical and contemporary spaces, creating a Todorovian hesitation. However, with a programme such as *Wail of the Banshee*, the fantastic is construed as alien and threatening, and is often marked out by visual effects such as videographics, departures from socio-cultural verisimilitude (all of the Banshee dressed in

business suits, even when appearing as children), and the repeated use of screens and mirrors to indicate surveillance. Likewise in *The Georgian House*, the fantastic timeslip is created solely through Chromakey and visual effects to bridge the gap between what are then presented as two separate but equally realist historical periods.

Modality within live-action drama is therefore both elaborate and diverse, and used to create multifarious affects. The chief emotional response however tends towards reassurance. Most television fantasy tends to follow the fantasy story structure as described by John Clute. In his definitive *Encyclopaedia of Fantasy*, he writes

A fantasy text may be described as the story of an earned passage from Bondage – via a central Recognition of what has been revealed and of what is about to happen, and which may involve a profound Metamorphosis of protagonist or world (or both) – into the Eucatastrophe, where marriages may occur, just governance fertilize the barren Land, and there is a Healing.

The healing within children's television fantasy is often related to the restoration of the status quo, but healing is also often contiguous in children's television drama with the public service values inherent in British broadcasting. The metamorphosis of the protagonist or the world emerges from the public service values of the BBC. While this may seem a totalising analysis of fifty years of children's television drama, I argue that all of these dramas are products of an industrial and cultural model of broadcasting that was always conscious of its public service remit and its own need to be competitive, post-1955, and this was a dynamic at work on both sides of the regulated duopoly.

This perspective of children's television drama as a perpetual theatre of the politics of broadcasting is supported by Maire Messenger Davies' assessment that '[s]creen media for children, far from being an innocent and valuefree area of culture, is often found at the cutting edge of the clash between public service values and the market, currently dominating public discourse about broadcasting, such as the future of the BBC.'⁴⁷⁴ She goes on to extrapolate the textual and narrative features of 1990s fantasy drama, *The Demon Headmaster*, using the serial's concept of 'Crazyspace', an overlooked space of nonsense, creativity and subversion, to the wider model of children's television drama. She writes:

This subversive generic space has a number of characteristics: first, as suggested by the example in the internet cafe, Crazyspace is something which adults do not notice. Second, it involves the carnivalesque subversion of adult authority by child protagonists, conveyed not by serious narrative devices such as the adult courtroom drama, but through silly, childish, 'wacky' ingredients, such as the special cyberchannel that allows children to exchange jokes. Third, is its use of point of view: children's screen drama is told (and largely shot) from the point of view of the child protagonists – "coping with adults, or coping without them". Children are the agents of good, and 'good' adults are myopic: they do not see what is going on, which permits children to be the story's main protagonists and moral centre. Fourth, there is a sense, as with fairytale, of the universality of the experiences of childhood. Fifth, aesthetically there is often a violation of realism. Children's fiction generally is less bound by constraints of realism than adult's; magic, fantasy, fairytale and slapstick humour, are staple ingredients which for producers are creatively liberating and for children provide the psychological release of a 'long ago and far away'.

⁴⁷⁴ Davies 'Crazyspace' *Screen*, 391

Sixth is the didactic element, often required by adult publishers, programme commissioners and policymakers, but also by children themselves. This is often demonstrated by the setting of 'good' examples and through the encouragement of empathy for the less fortunate.

Davies' delineation of children's television drama as a 'crazyspace' in which fantasy functions as a distancing and a learning technique supports this thesis' claim that children's television fantasy, throughout its existence within the regulated duopoly, has been a valuable form of drama for children from both a production and a cultural perspective. Even with the notorious instability of audiences and the invisibility of the child audience, Davies still asserts from direct research in the 1990s that children respond to drama as an important and meaningful form with which they can engage.

Children's Television Fantasy since 1994

The narrative of British children's television since 1994 has been described as one of decline but is also necessarily one of re-orientation. In 1994, Roger Singleton-Turner, a BBC director and instructor, enumerated the challenges which faced children's television productions in the early to mid-1990s, chief amongst which were resources, multichannel competition and the lack of financial return on children's television. Despite this, he pointed out, '[i]n the wake of the Broadcasting Act's enshrining "of children's programmes as one of its few mandatory categories after 1992," the budget for children's programmes for ITV in 1991 was declared to be £40 million. Perhaps our fears are groundless.'⁴⁷⁵ Certainly, the production of BBC and ITV fantasy drama remained relatively stable in the years immediately following. Some of the fantastic dramas

⁴⁷⁵ Singleton-Turner *Television and Children*, 48-49

produced between 1994 and 2000 included *Elidor*, *The Queen's Nose*, *Delta Wave*, *The Demon Headmaster*, *Aquila*, *The Magician's House*, *The Ghost Hunter*, *Life Force*, *The Genie From Down Under*, and *The Return of the Borrowers*. However, by 2002, children's television production at ITV had dropped due to massive cuts in funding, and the following year, this was compounded by the 'termination of the quota regime by the 2003 Communications Act' which meant that '[c]ommercial PSBs (ITV and Five) no longer have to meet quantitative targets for children's programming'.⁴⁷⁶ Three years later, the ban on food advertising during children's schedules meant that children's television production was an even more economically unappealing option for ITV. From 2006, it closed its in-house production facilities for children and the CiTV digital channel schedule is now largely constituted of occasional commissions and frequent repeats.

The BBC maintains an in-house production culture for children's television but this too has undergone massive restructuring and reinvention. Fantasy drama was and remains until the present day a vital part of this prestige and brand, and CBBC now proudly boasts several critically acclaimed and internationally popular fantasy dramas, such as *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, *Young Dracula*, *Wolfblood* and others. However, the criteria and processes of production has changed forever, from a departmental approach to a more fragmented production process led by market research, global appeal and fiat. This is due in large part to the accelerating convergence of media forms and broadcasters, but equally, as Lynn Whitaker's examination of BBC Scotland's children's television production suggests, a move towards a production culture which limits staff investment, a concomitant marginalisation of creative spaces and processes, and an institutional reluctance to take risks with

⁴⁷⁶ Steemers 'The Canary in the Coalmine', 214

content and form; a far cry from the experimental, culturally reflexive and strongly departmentalised production culture of BBC Children's in the 1970s.⁴⁷⁷

Nevertheless, a relationship of fantasy, didacticism and public service values within children's television persists to the present day. Productions such as *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, for example, use the fantastic to frame the roles and responsibilities of children in 21st- century Britain. Using the domestic spaces of Bannerman Road, London, as the locus for adventures often resolved through an ethics of care and parent-child relationships, *The Sarah Jane Adventures* reformulated its heroine from a Doctor Who companion to the mother to two alien children. It also not coincidentally situated Britain as the first line of defence in intergalactic conflict, reminiscent of the history of British science fiction television and nostalgically invoking a sense of global imperialism through the transmission of 21st-century British democratic values. Sarah Jane's maternal role establishes her within society as the focal point for the broadcasting of values of citizenship, democracy and learning. These values were already an intrinsic part of the early BBC children's television, according to David Oswell, who describes it as working to 'construct a normative ethos for the child and to connect the child to external world in an active form of citizenship and public participation.'⁴⁷⁸ I suggest that this ethos persists in *The Sarah Jane Adventures* and is embodied in Sarah Jane as a response to the contemporary pressures on children's drama.

After the Broadcasting Act 1990 and the Communications Act of 2003, children's public service broadcasting was under threat; children's drama production at BBC and ITV had

⁴⁷⁷ Lynn Whitaker, *Producing UK children's public service broadcasting in the 21st century: a case study of BBC Scotland* Unpublished PhD Thesis 2011 [<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/3012/1/2011WhitakerPhD.pdf>], 176-180

⁴⁷⁸ Oswell *Television, Culture and the Home*, 49

dropped and even the popular *Adventures* was at risk. Series 3 was, despite critical acclaim and awards, nearly cancelled as a cost-cutting exercise. Sarah Jane's role as both a defender of the world and a mother to two alien children creates a normative ethos that valorises 21st-century ethics of care, communication and citizenship but it also creates a normative ethos for the importance of children's public service broadcasting, especially through drama. Historical British children's television is used as an intertext to locate the *Adventures* as part of a great tradition, explicitly referencing programmes such as *Mr Benn*, *The Tomorrow People*, *King of the Castle*, and of course its parent text, *Doctor Who*. Sarah Jane as parent, teacher, friend and occasional saviour stands for the importance of BBC Children's to children, using fantasy to transmit both the BBC brand and the Corporation's continuing public service values, if indeed those can be separated.

More recent fantasy dramas such as *Young Dracula* and *Wolfblood* also emphasise the importance of community, care and social responsibility within fantastic narratives of vampires and werewolves. However, the form and structure of these three dramas is distinctly different from those serials produced in the 20th century, due to changes in the production ecology as much as technological advancement. While the last series of *The Sarah Jane Adventures* only ran to six episodes, due to the untimely death of Lis Sladen, the previous few seasons had run to twelve episodes (6 two-part arcs) which gave the BBC a sustained run over a quarter year, ideal for building audiences and selling the serial overseas. It also functioned as what Clare Parody calls transmedia adaptation, reformulating Sarah Jane Smith from primetime entertainment for Children's as part of a media franchise.⁴⁷⁹ Through this model, *The Sarah Jane Adventures* could be distributed on multiple platforms,

⁴⁷⁹ Clare Parody 'Franchising/Adaptation' in *Adaptation* (2011) 4(2): 210-218

merchandising opportunities and media productions. As part of the *Who* franchise and as part of children's television, *The Sarah Jane Adventures* could be marketed to several distinct demographics while maintaining the BBC brand and more importantly the character of BBC Children's longstanding traditions and ethos. Similarly, *Wolfblood*, a co-production by CBBC and ZDF, has a strong merchandise strategy, with multiple licensees for various products.⁴⁸⁰ It too operates as a transmedia property, Kidscreen declaring that '[t]he series will be supported by a number of online-exclusive episodes, a downloadable app and additional products (magazines, posters, prints) from new licensees recently brought on by Bulldog Licensing.'⁴⁸¹ Interestingly, *Wolfblood's* promotional material both in tone and aesthetic bears a certain resemblance to the marketing for MTV's *Teen Wolf*, albeit with fewer prosthetics and less nudity. *Wizards vs Aliens* too has been another recent addition to the stable of glossy, fantasy children's dramas by the BBC; yet again, another transmedia production. *Wizards vs Aliens* however benefits from a well-known writer and producer in Russell T. Davies, effectively constructing the production as authored drama from the previous show runner of the regenerated *Doctor Who*.

This development of current fantasy dramas by the BBC is not difficult to fathom. Firstly, in the absence of any sustained production by ITV since 2006, the BBC and its continuing, if unstable, commitment to children's programming has been the only game in town. Drama production via independent production is a speculative venture unless commissioned, and ITV's commissions are irregular and rare. British children's drama therefore has fewer production avenues for development

⁴⁸⁰ Aaron Hutchins 'Wolfblood adds to its pack of licensees' *Kidscreen* August 6th 2014 [<http://kidscreen.com/2014/08/06/wolfblood-adds-to-its-pack-of-licensees/>] (accessed January 4th 2016)

⁴⁸¹ Jeremy Dickson 'CBBC ramps up fall slate with homegrown dramas' *Kidscreen* August 27th 2014 <http://kidscreen.com/2014/08/27/cbbc-ramps-up-fall-slate-with-homegrown-dramas/>

in the 21st century. However, the popularity and prevalence of the fantastic within BBC Children's productions may be traced back to the 1990s. The fantastic dislocates productions from the cultural specificity which both Home and Lewis Rudd (ITV children's) identify as a barrier to international sales in *Children and Television Drama: A Review of the Literature* (1996), and as an aesthetic the fantastic allows for the deployment of cutting edge effects and visual style useful in branding, marketing and audience appeal.

In 2010, Alison Peirse suggested that in the multichannel television era, 'it seems unlikely that children's telefantasy can thrive'.⁴⁸² However, I suggest rather that children's television drama has moved away from its departmentalised, child-centred production culture and broad output of fantasy serials and single plays throughout the year, in favour of a more specialised production strategy using fantasy to broaden international appeal and generate particular visual styles, which reinforces the BBC Children's brand. In other words, children's television fantasy drama has shifted in line with industrial and cultural imperatives from a broadcast model to one that more closely resembles the niche programming identified by Catherine Johnson in primetime telefantasy.

This production shift has been perhaps inevitable, given the decline of the traditional schedule of children's programming and television as a whole, as British broadcasters move towards a time shifted, multiplatform and digital model of content production. At the same time, the move away from London by the BBC in the lead up to the 2006 Charter renewal meant that increasingly while the BBC Children's division moved to Salford, its drama production became dispersed across several regional production centres, including BBC Scotland and Wales. Part of this development of fantasy drama by the BBC is

⁴⁸² Alison Peirse 'A Broken Tradition' *Visual Culture in Britain*

undoubtedly a production strategy to maximise revenue and audiences whilst maintaining a relationship with the old forms of children's television and public service broadcasting.

Whitaker suggests that '[t]he days of a public service ethos driving the entire television market are almost over, except that the PSB mission to 'inform, educate and entertain' sits well with children's media and so remains an effective means of selling commercial children's content (Steemers 2004).'⁴⁸³

Defying Peirse's predictions, British children's television fantasy drama has therefore been remodulated into a more intensively profitable and useful production form and mode since the 1990s, incorporating brand identity, public service values and transmedia potential in both platform and merchandising. Jeanette Steemers stated that '[t]he problem with children's television is that, in most cases, it does not make much economic sense unless it can be marketed as an all-encompassing brand with ancillary revenues from a range of consumer products.'⁴⁸⁴ I suggest that this is precisely what BBC children's fantasy drama has been restructured as; a profitable production strategy and genre which can be parlayed into a brand with popular appeal. While this brand sustains PSB values in a new form, some critics, both inside and outside the industry, have expressed concern that children's television produced within such a discourse is the most valuable or most creative service for children. In 2011, Lynn Whitaker described a production culture in the Children's Department at BBC Scotland that 'rather than using its distinctive PSB position as a means of protecting creativity (as promised by the "Creative

⁴⁸³ Lynn Whitaker, 'Creative Bloody Futures': Discourses of Creativity in BBC Children's Production' in *eSharp*, Issue 14: Imagination and Innovation (Winter 2009) 132-155 [<http://www.gla.ac.uk/esharp>] (accessed 3rd January 2016)

⁴⁸⁴ Steemers 'The "Canary in the Coalmine"', 214

Futures” strategy), was actually highly risk-averse due to its perception of commercial pressures and competition.⁴⁸⁵

Home suggests that arguments for the value of British children’s television have been derailed in the intervening years. She argues that the emphasis in the discussion about public service broadcasting since 2006 has been placed, wrongly she argues, on the technology rather than the productions and their PSB value: ‘the pipes not the poems’.⁴⁸⁶ This seems to be a similar technological emphasis to that of the early 1980s, but in the 21st century this is an approach internalised at the BBC rather than a politically external one.

While British children’s television is therefore still extant and even, per the BBC, thriving, it does not and in all probability will not ever operate within the same structures, policies and discourses of production, philosophy and particularisation, or even the same media, as it used to. Certainly, this was an almost inevitable result of media overtake and convergence, but there is still very much a sense that plurality and national and regional representation has been elided in favour of monolithic, corporate production and certain children’s genres which constituted the ‘balance’ of schedules at both BBC and ITV have been lost. Indeed, in 2007, ITV which had long since rationalised its regulatory and scheduling mechanisms from the ITV Network Children’s Sub-Group (previously the subcommittee) to the Children’s Controller at the ITV Network Centre, likewise rationalised its production of children’s television. Consequently, as Whitaker identifies, a significant segment of children’s public service broadcasting was lost; not only did ITV relinquish its production of children’s television, the independent production sector also took a substantial hit. As

⁴⁸⁵ Whitaker ‘Creative Bloody Futures’, 143

⁴⁸⁶ Anna Home ‘The Struggle for Quality Children’s Television in the UK’ *Journal of Children and Media* Volume 5, Issue 1, February 2011, pages 102-106, 104

BBC production staff had admitted ITV's institution as a spur to BBC Children's programmes productivity and creativity in 1960, so they now bemoaned the loss of competition and the final death of regulated duopoly which they stated could only be detrimental, if not fatal, to British children's television. Yet the BBC still maintains the production of children's television within the discourse of public service broadcasting despite the increasing need for global commercial appeal from the 1980s onwards, incorporating British values of democracy, citizenship and social ethics into children's television drama.⁴⁸⁷ However, certain aesthetics, genres and experimental discourses have been lost in the drive to make children's drama as globally and commercially appealing as possible. It is impossible to imagine dramas such as *Sky* would be made today, and it is even doubtful whether a programme such as *Wizards vs Aliens* might have been made without the successful reputation of Russell T. Davies behind it.

As shown throughout this thesis, television fantasy drama for children has been an overlooked genre within an already overlooked production culture. This, despite the proliferate uses and pleasures not only to viewers but to producers and broadcasters. Fantasy drama has been present from the earliest days of children's television, and its production and treatment has reflected and produced historical, institutional and cultural conceptions of the child audience, of the broadcasters themselves, and of the nation as a social, cultural and mythic space. Fantasy drama is not just broadcasting; it is, to use Anna Home's words, 'a broader vision',⁴⁸⁸ and has as such been constitutive of the British character, culture and imaginary throughout the 20th century and into the 21st.

⁴⁸⁷ Victoria Byard "'A Hero Mum'sy': Parenting, Power, and Production Changes in The Sarah Jane Adventures' in *British Television Drama: Past, Present and Future* ed. Jonathan Bignell and Stephen Lacey (Houndmills & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000 2014:2nd edn)

⁴⁸⁸ Anna Home, interview with author, London, June 21st, 2013

Appendix

Interview with Anna Home: BAFTA, 21st June 2013

VB: So I suppose to get started, we'll start right at the beginning: can you say a little bit about how you first got involved in children's television? I believe you got involved in the Children's Department in about 1964, is that right?

AH: Yes, I'd read History at Oxford and I got a traineeship at the BBC: not a general traineeship which was the grown-up big one, but they didn't take a woman until about four years after me. So I got a traineeship as something called a studio manager which is basically a sound engineer in radio, and I worked mainly at Bush House in the World Service, putting out programmes in Czech and Russian and Urdu and Hindi. It was the most amazing place and while I was there I applied for various attachments to departments and didn't get them, and I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do. I'd originally wanted to be an actress and decided, when I was at Oxford, that I wasn't good enough and then I thought I vaguely wanted to do something that would link education and drama, theatre, whatever you like, so I applied for various jobs in Schools radio and didn't get them. Then BBC 2 happened, or was about to happen, and there was a huge expansion. The first thing that happened was there was a general call for people to apply without being specific as to what they were applying for, and I applied for that, as we all did, all my generation did, and I was turned down as being unsuitable for television. Nobody ever told me what that meant. A little later, there was an advert for a researcher for a then unnamed and unknown new pre-school programme which turned into *Playschool*. So I went straight from radio to television, knowing absolutely nothing about

television at all, and I learnt very quickly. We all learned very quickly. We were all very lucky: we were directing studios within six to eight weeks of starting and nobody told us how to do it; the vision mixers and the cameramen carried us through. Anyway, I was always interested in children's literature, very interested in children's literature, and so I was in charge of the story bit of *Playschool*. It always had a daily story and out of that came *Jackanory*, a storytelling programme, and at that stage there was no children's drama. It had been removed from the children's department and what children's family drama there was was done by the adult drama department. A number of us, particularly me, got really frustrated that we couldn't do any drama and we managed to persuade the then-Head of the department to let us have a go at dramatizing bits of *Jackanory*.

VB: Sorry, would this be Monica Sims?

AH: That was Monica, yes, who's still with us. The first one we did which was semi-dramatised was *The Witch's Daughter* by Nina Bawden, which was an utter and complete disaster. One of the leading actors had a heart attack in the middle of it and had to be helicoptered off Mull. We filmed in a tidal cave – when I think about Health and Safety now! – down a very, very narrow path with a small child. Anyway, it was a disaster.

VB: You liked to live on the edge, didn't you?

AH: Well, in those days you did. You just got on with it. So I really thought we wouldn't be allowed to do any more but we were, and so gradually we built up. It was very ad hoc, the drama department, and I suppose because I was so into children's literature we did concentrate a lot on adaptations, both classic children's literature and modern children's literature. We did stuff by Leon Garfield and Philippa Pearce and Helen Cresswell and all that generation of children's writers as well as the Nesbits, and then people like Peter Dickinson

who were in a slightly different area, and we just built it up from there. At that stage, I was still actually directing stuff and then producing, and then I executive produced the whole of the drama area. I started Grange Hill and we did a lot more contemporary stuff, which we needed to do. We did a mixture, I suppose: we did Catherine Cookson, all that sort of stuff, and we did quite large scale period drama, latterly. Anyway, then I got bored and went off to TVS, and I suppose the major drama we did there was *Knights of God* which was so far ahead of its time it's not true. Nobody knows where it is: the TVS library was sold to Disney so nobody knows where things are, there's no chain of ownership. You can't get at anything; it's so frustrating.

VB: There does seem to be that general problem with a lot of ITV properties.

AH: Yes, it is, it is. The foundation that I now chair-

VB: The Children's Media Foundation?

AH: The Children's Media Foundation. One of our aims is to try and unlock some of that archive but I don't know whether we'll be able to with both BBC and ITV. The BBC one, in theory, is easier because the chain of title is clearer but, even so, half of it doesn't exist. Some of it the BBC has, and some of it they don't know what they've got, and some of it the BFI has, so it's a big project. That's one of things that, in theory, Lewis is involved in.

VB: Well, I think if you ever managed something like that you would hear cheers from the television academics around the world.

AH: Well, what we would like to do is make it available via our website to academics and genuine [indistinguishable], but of

course the BBC and ITV, or whoever owns the ITV libraries, is busy saying, 'Ah yes, it might have a commercial value,' so-

VB: I think, increasingly, in this sort of economy nothing in academia has much of a commercial value.

AH: So I don't know what will happen. Anyway I did *Knights of God* and-

VB: *Witches and the Grinnygog*, which I was watching last night.

AH: *Witches and the Grinnygog*, yes. I'd forgotten about that. Who wrote *Witches and the Grinnygog*? I can't remember.

VB: Oh, I saw it on the credits last night and I cannot bring it to mind, for the life of me.

AH: And did Dorothea direct it?

VB: Again, sorry, I can't remember.

AH: Because she was an amazing woman and she was very badly done by, by the BBC. She was quite old by then and when we went to TVS I gave her- I don't think it was *Witches and the Grinnygog*, it was something else but that was virtually her last freelance project. Yes, we did do *Witches and the Grinnygog* and some of the short *Dramaramas* that we did, they were pretty wild as well. Have you seen those?

VB: I've seen several of them: did Television South do 'A Young Person's Guide to Getting Their Ball Back'?

AH: Yes, Nigel Baldwin.

VB: Yes, that's something special.

AH: Well, actually after I've seen you, I'm having lunch with John Dale who produced both *Knights of God* and that, and is a very close friend of mine. So if you want to talk to him-

VB: Oh my word, yes. I would like to talk to everyone but-

AH: And then, just to finish off the story, I went back to the BBC as Head of the Department and obviously was much further away from it than I had been before.

VB: Of course, because you were back as Head of Department.

AH: So, I was running the whole lot and it was very political and very difficult and certainly the John Birt period was horrendous, but we did manage to keep it going, the drama. We did *Chronicles of Narnia* which was quite an achievement. When I look at our *Narnia*, I reckon that the people who made the film learned a lot from it: some of the shots are virtually identical.

VB: Yes, Alex Kirby said something very similar. In terms of how influential it's been, I was actually talking to one of the eighteen-year-old students I teach a couple of months ago and I mentioned what I was doing and the *Chronicles of Narnia*. He went 'Oh, I loved that!' and he's this big, buff nineteen year old who plays rugby.

AH: But this is true. It sticks with people, it really does. For instance, *The Box of Delights*, which was done by the BBC while I wasn't there but I had always wanted to do, I had heard on the radio when I was a child and it was one of the strongest memories of my childhood. It does stick. So we did various things and that, of course, was when we commissioned Russell, which was quite fun: quite controversial, that was.

VB: What, the appointment or the programmes that he made?

AH: The programmes. You see, if you look at those now and I haven't looked at them for a long time, there's no way the Children's Department would do that now.

VB: Yes, *Century Falls*, in particular, I think.

AH: Century Falls, in particular.

VB: Because there were a couple of moments where I was genuinely terrified and I'm thirty-five now. Dark Season was also one of the programmes that I was deliberately returning home from school to watch, as well as Archer's Goon. Just going back to the idea that the Children's Department didn't have control of drama or light entertainment when Family Programmes was operating: how did the idea that the children's department should have their own drama, should have control of their own department, come about. Was it just a general underswell of feeling?

AH: It was a general underswell, and Monica who had come in [as head of Children's] had worked in Women's Programmes. She was producing Women's Hour in radio and then she came back and it very swiftly became Children's again and not Family. You could actually talk to her about that because she must have been much more aware of the politics than we were. As far as the [resurgence of] drama was concerned, I think it was also because there was a change in the hierarchy at that point and the whole thing changed again, but really it was that there were people like me and Marilyn Fox and Paul Stone and what we really wanted to do was drama, and we just went on chipping away really. There was no allocated budget or anything; we just took it from places. The first proper one that we did that was a full-scale drama, and it's not fantasy so it's not really part of your remit, but it was Joe and the Gladiator.

VB: Is that the one with the horse?

AH: Catherine Cookson with the horse and the rag and bone man, which nearly killed me. Again, we did it on a shoestring and with a non-drama crew and we hired a rag and bone man's horse and cart and we went to the scrapyards to hire it and the

guy looked at me and said, 'I don't do business with little girls.' Luckily, I had a male P.A. That would have upset him even more, I think. That was the first one that was properly done.

VB: And that was on location, was it?

AH: That was on location: South Shields in Newcastle, and South Shields when it was pretty, pretty tough.

VB: That must have been a big commitment in terms of time and production budget?

AH: Well, we did it on tuppence ha'penny, and we didn't have proper design or anything like that. We basically did the sets ourselves and washed the clothes at night. The unions didn't get involved but you couldn't go on doing it like that. It had to be put on a proper footing which it gradually was.

VB: And was there ever a moment of sea-change where the department went, 'Right, we have it now'?

AH: No, not really. I mean, you were never quite sure whether you were going to be allowed to go on doing it. I don't how long it took to make it. I can't remember what we called them in those days, they weren't called business managers, but there was a very devious business head, a man called George Ageros, a wily Greek, and he used to fiddle the budgets. That's how we did it. Once you've established a precedent in the BBC, you can build on that precedent and that's what we did.

VB: Fantastic.

AH: You couldn't do it now, there are too many checks and balances. But in those days, it was almost amateur and very entrepreneurial. Everything was very expansionist and there was money and people were prepared to take risks. Senior Management was prepared to take risks in a way that it isn't, as far as I can see, anymore.

VB: Do you feel that at that particular time they were more inclined to take risks on drama rather than anything else? Was that perhaps part of it, or was it just generally [indistinguishable?]??

AH: They were taking risks on drama because drama is a high risk [genre]. I suppose the other great risk they took was Newsround at that time.

VB: Yes, of course, but there was a precedent also for a Children's Newsreel, I believe, from the 1950s?

AH: Way, way back, yes, but it was very anodyne and it wasn't news. Well, nor is Newsround now; Newsround has changed very much.

VB: Yes, I can see that just from watching it now.

AH: And the Newsreel was similar to current Newsround: much more lighthearted. It was obviously completely different because it was in the 1950s but when I was Head of department, one of the great debates we had, one of the great rows I had with John Craven, was about the first AIDS campaign and how much we talked about things like AIDS. I don't know if they would do it now.

VB: I don't know: maybe, but it would be very carefully couched, and of course the entire culture surrounding publicity campaigns has changed. In the 1980s, I remember that gravestone.

AH: Yes, well, we showed that and my argument was that they're going to see it anyway so it's better that someone explains to them in some way what it's about. It's nothing to be frightened of. Anyway, John Craven didn't approve but he did it, but that's not to do with your thesis.

VB: Oh, no, but I'm interested in learning the background and the surrounding culture and policies as well, just to get an idea of how-

AH: The great thing about the Children's Department then, and I think to a certain extent still now but much, much less, was that it operated as a separate fiefdom, and when you hear all this going on about the BBC - one bit of the BBC doesn't talk to the other - it is absolutely true. The departments are in competition for money, but nobody had ever really cared about the Children's Department. I mean, it was frightfully useful when renewing Charters and licences but on the whole no one ever watched it apart from us really, so you could really get on with it which was very good. We encouraged that certainly, out of sight, out of mind, and let us get on with what we're doing; then when there were rows like there were over Grange Hill and quite a lot of the grown-ups thought we should stop doing it, Monica was terrific over that and stood up and fought for it, and we just went on. It was quite self-contained and still is. The ethos of the whole children's media world is actually quite tight and quite small, even now. Obviously there are all sorts of different elements in it now; television is only a minor element.

VB: Of course, with the advent of the internet and mobile technology-

AH: And apps and the whole lot, but it's all content and the content creators; you can feel it.

VB: So going back to the idea of drama and drama for children and the fact that drama came back to the Children's Department, was that because you wanted to make drama or was it also because you wanted to make drama specifically for children and you didn't feel that other departments were doing it?

AH: Yes. What I, personally, was very interested in was actually talking to the child and bugger the adults, really.

VB: That's probably going to make it as a chapter title, I have to warn you.

AH: Because it seemed to me, and it still seems to me, that childhood is a very brief time and, as we said earlier, it's a very impressionable time and you need to be talked to, as a child, in your own terms and in your own emotional terms. There's wonderful drama made by adults, obviously, for adults, for a wider audience, but it doesn't specifically address the concerns and interests of the child. It's the same ethos that pertains to things like Tellytubbies, which again we were deeply criticised for, but Anne Wood was absolutely right. She was catering, and she had done a huge amount of research, for two year olds, not for their mums. We always believed that as children have their own literature, so they should have their own media.

VB: Absolutely. When you first started, it was Family Programmes.

AH: Yes, under Doreen Stephens.

VB: Doreen Stephens was in charge, but it was a very short run. When it changed back over to being the Children's Department was there a shift in tone, do you feel?

AH: It was gradual; it didn't happen overnight.

VB: So it didn't come with the change of title?

AH: No.

VB: And a lot of people, I assume, were still working from Family Programming and went into Children's? Or was there a change in personnel?

AH: It was Women's programmes which had been amalgamated with Children's [in 1964]. The Women's

programming kind of disappeared and some of the Women's staff went into further education and things like that so the Children's programming became more prominent. Obviously, it was [then] Children's, and there was an expansion and more people started to come in. Some people came in from the Schools department: Dorothea, at one point, did come into the Children's Department for instance and then gradually it built up as a department. But the core was always Blue Peter. Blue Peter was always singular and a law unto itself, and then the rest of it grew up round that really. Then you get Saturday morning [programming] which is another thing in its own right, and then Newsround came. So you had subdivisions and we were fiction, I suppose.

VB: Sorry, you've covered so much that I'm trying to sort through my questions. Alastair McGown in *The Hill and Beyond*, his encyclopaedia of children's drama, suggests you were in charge of all the BBC drama by 1975, and you said yourself that you were executive producing a lot of it. How did that come about?

AH: It was just gradual really. Because there was so much more of it, it needed someone to oversee it and that's how it came about.

VB: So by that point you'd achieved so much volume in terms of drama-

AH: Yes, and in a way, you know, it's always sad when you get further away from the coalface because the fun bit is the coalface. But it was kind of inevitable really and particularly in the BBC at that period you were expected to keep on doing that-

VB: Advancing through the ranks?

AH: Yes.

VB: You were talking about adaptations earlier, and that would tie in with your love of children's literature. Was there anything in particular that you looked for in an adaptation?

AH: You always looked for how you could retain the original ethos and intention of the book but transform it. Television or film is not ever the book; it is a version of the book but a version which tries to keep the essence of it. Something like *The Changes*, which I adapted and which was a nightmare, is a flawed book. The ending doesn't work at all and Peter [Dickinson] knows that, and he and I used to talk for hours and hours and hours [about it]. The television ending is completely different from the book ending, so you do change a lot but I think you've always got to have respect for the original material. And I think if the original writer is around, it's better if you can consult but make it absolutely clear that you have the final decision. Although I let Helen [Cresswell] do it, I don't really like authors doing their own adaptations because on the whole they tend to be too close to them and they find it very difficult to stand back and drop stuff.

VB: They can't kill their own darlings, especially on television.

AH: Yes.

VB: A lot of these adaptations have been fantasy: things like *The Changes*, *Chronicles of Narnia*, *Witches* and the *Grinnygog*. I think you said it in an interview with Maire Messenger Davies quite a while back that there'd been a falling off in adaptations. That question changed trajectory somewhere in the middle: let's go with the second half. You said to Maire Messenger Davies that there'd been a falling off in the production of adaptations by BBC television; do you think that's still the case?

AH: Well, they're not doing much drama anyway.

VB: But in the period that you were in children's television, across that time?

AH: In my period? I suppose, slightly, yes, but I suppose because of the volume of stuff like Grange Hill and Byker Grove, you know, there was a lot of contemporary drama.

VB: Those were twenty episode runs, weren't they?

AH: Yes, and, of course, the cost of period or fantasy comes into the equation but we always tried to do one biggie a year at least, like a Narnia. Of course, we did Narnia over three years.

VB: You said that you tried to do one 'biggie' and you specifically mentioned period or fantasy drama. Do you think those were easier to sell towards the end of that period?

AH: They were easier to get money for from the BBC Worldwide or Enterprises or whatever they were called then. They would invest in something they thought they could sell and by the end of time, and increasingly now, you've got to have that input to do something of that nature. Narnia was interesting because it was really my present for going back, I suppose.

VB: Here, we got you this?

AH: Well, no, not quite like that, but we had been trying to get the rights for years and years and years: before I went away [to TVS] and then when I came back again. I think we got them finally after I'd arrived [back at the BBC] and I went to Michael Grade and said, 'We have got the rights to Narnia. You're going to have to finance it,' because there was no way that we could do it on the kind of budgets that we had. He was fantastic. I remember sitting in his office and he picked up the phone to BBC Enterprises and said, 'Anna's got the rights to Narnia and you're going to put some money, a lot of money, in.' And they did.

VB: And that was coincidentally – well, not so coincidentally, perhaps – when you got the Sunday serial back, is that right?

AH: Yes, we did. Or actually, no, didn't they get it back for The Box of Delights or was that weekdays?

VB: I've got a sneaking suspicion it might have been weekdays but it was leading up to Christmas.

AH: That's right. I think you're right. I think we did get it back for Narnia because Narnia was so big. I think you're right.

VB: But again, did that set a precedent? So once you got it back, you could negotiate.

AH: For a bit, yes, and I am told that they can now pitch together with the Drama department for Sunday slots, but I don't know whether they're ever going to achieve much.

VB: I suppose the entire idea of schedule-

AH: That's all changed completely.

VB: Yes, absolutely. The idea of the Sunday serial perhaps isn't quite as potent anymore.

AH: No. What they're talking about is family serials at six p.m.

VB: Stuff like Merlin and things like that. To go back to that question I swerved out of before: there are an awful lot of fantasy adaptations in the stuff that you were involved in. Was that a particular favourite of yours or was it just luck of the draw that it came up and it seemed like an achievable goal?

AH: It was a period when there was a lot of very fine fantasy writing and I think that's really why. We did do a lot of non-fantasy when you think about it but I suppose the more spectacular ones were fantasy, and then there were more

mundane things like Jumbo Spencer and things like that which trundled along on a slightly lower level.

VB: Given that some of them might have been slightly more spectacular given that they were fantastic, was there a certain way that they were approached or that they fit into the schedule?

AH: You tried to have a balance so that it wasn't all fantasy and the reason for Grange Hill was that I really wanted to do something that was contemporary, tough, and realistic to counterbalance the fantasy, and also I wanted a balance between modern fantasy and classic fantasy.

VB: Which does tend to be Edwardian and Victorian.

AH: It's basically Nesbit, plus a few similar.

VB: Absolutely. There's a similar sort of thing going on in ITV in the 1970s: HTV West is putting out a lot of fantasy output and there's a quite a lot of stuff that's really quite unusual. Was there a sense at any point at which you were tailoring output to compete with ITV or was it very much departmental?

AH: It was very much happenstance, really. The idea of competing with ITV from the BBC side was not [really an issue]. When you went into ITV, you were much more aware of the competitive force than you were within the BBC where you were fairly complacent and just got on with it really.

VB: The thing with ITV is, I suppose, that it's not just competing with an alternate channel but actually competing for time on the national network as well.

AH: Absolutely, and that was quite a rude shock, I have to say, going into a company that was not a top company.

VB: Because TVS was a start-up, really, wasn't it?

AH: It was a complete start-up. It was one of the most exciting things I ever did in my life, but we behaved with great arrogance and we behaved as if we were a Major and we expected to be treated as such. You realise I displaced Lewis Rudd at Southern and all that. We're still relatively friendly- but thank God he got a job at Central! Bidding round that table for slots is quite daunting really but, again, the Children's bit of it is, was, less competitive and we did work together much more. You had people like Andrea Wonfor at Tyne Tees and me, both as regional companies, but really, really interested in doing it so we managed to do more than our grown-up peers probably did. Then of course we did co-operatives like Dramarama.

VB: But I believe that you were fairly instrumental in that. I've read through the minutes for the IBA Children's Sub-Committee and there does seem to be a certain shift in the 1980s whereby it becomes a lot more streamlined, a lot more organised, a lot more codified, not just because they put some sort of policy-making in place with Watch It! and then CITV but there seems to be a more professionalised attitude towards children's television.

AH: I think that's true. Yes, I think that is true and I think people like Charles Denton were quite interested in Children's and then of course the Saturday morning programming became quite interesting as well, with No 73 ousting whatever it was called.

VB: Tiswas?

AH: Tiswas, yes. That made us very unpopular.

VB: I believe Lew Grade knew how to hold a grudge.

AH: But I think it did become, as you said, more professional. Then because you'd also got Lewis in a Major and Lewis was a children's person through and through; that helped a lot.

VB: Talking about people in Majors and in regional companies and in ITV companies generally, there are quite a few ITV companies that don't actually have children's departments.

AH: Well, there aren't any ITV companies left.

VB: True enough, but even when there were regional companies, there seemed to be a couple of companies that for certain periods of time didn't have children's department.

AH: I think it depended to a certain extent on who was in the company so, for instance, when Joy Whitby was at Yorkshire Television, they did Flambards and what have you, and then when she'd moved on, they didn't really do much. They did some pre-school programming but not much. Thames of course had had a very fine tradition of children's programming with Pamela Lonsdale and all that lot but that didn't go on. Then Central came forward and then it was Central and before that it was Southern, and then Central and TVS. So it all goes up and down.

VB: So it seems a little contingent upon who is operating within the company and what their strengths are.

AH: Or in terms of when franchises get renewed what they're looking for. The reason I was part of the TVS franchise, which was twelve men and me, was that Lady Plowden had made it known that children's was a concern and that's why they shoved me in to major on children's and according to some of the histories, it was one of the elements that gave us the franchise.

VB: But that does seem to be a concern that comes up every time there's a contract change, doesn't it? The provision for children as well as regional-

AH: Well, of course, now they don't have any remit to do anything since the Communications Act before the last one; they have no obligation. They will do as little as they possibly can and I feel very sorry for Gina [?] because she's got no money and no power. She can commission tiny little things but that's all.

VB: It does seem to me that in the 1950s there was a lot of reliance on puppetry to fill in the gaps, but today it does seem to be animation.

AH: It's all animation. The danger, I think, increasingly is that animation equates with children's and that's it, and if you do enough animation, you've catered for children. That's why keeping the BBC honest is so terribly important, because nobody else is going to provide that kind of range. The Foundation has just done a response to the BBC consultation on its children's services which has just closed, and one of the things we've said in that is if you actually look at the figures the drama and factual within children's BBC is down and they need to be careful.

VB: Let's talk about fantasy drama then because you, over the time that you were in children's television, produced fantasy drama for BBC on several levels and for ITV as well. Where do you think fantasy drama fits into this idea of children's drama as a whole?

AH: I think fantasy in terms of children's lives in general is really, really important because I think that for a child a lot of big emotions are difficult to meet in real life but [they] actually can meet them through fantasy. I think that a child's mind is much more open to fantasy and imagination and I think it's a very important part of educating the adult to come, to have not just a narrow vision but a broader vision, just to be aware that there are more things in heaven and earth, really.

VB: So you feel that there are different things to be gained from realistic fiction and fantasy?

AH: I think you need both. I think as far as a child is concerned the more you can give, the widest variety you can give in literature, in media, in anything, [is best] rather than everything coming down, down, down. [For example,] All little girls have to have pink; that kind of narrowing down of imagination and views is terrifying.

VB: Do you feel that the fantasy drama that you were in charge of producing for the BBC differed from that which you were in charge of producing for ITV?

AH: No, I did what I wanted to, basically.

VB: So it was pretty much inflected by what you [wanted to see in children's television]?

AH: It was inflected by what I thought was interesting. This sounds terribly arrogant but it wasn't just me: people like Marilyn and Paul and Angela Beeching and all these people, we all talked a lot about it. Paul came from the theatre but basically we all came from a literary background and we were interested in books and interested in writers. I think one of things that Jackanory gave us was a fantastic introduction to writers both dead and alive and so one could actually say to Joan Aiken, 'Write something,' and it turned out to be Mortimer and Arabel. Basically, you tried to cater for different age ranges, you tried to give variety, but basically you did something that you engaged with, yes.

VB: Well, I think that's an absolutely valid way of approaching it because I feel like your personal enthusiasm is going to come through. So fantasy, you feel, was a necessary part of the children's output for balance, I suppose?

AH: Not just for balance, although that's certainly [a consideration], but also because it is a hugely important part of children's lives and children's literature. This all comes out of literature initially and it goes back to literature when you commission and *The Changes* comes out as a book. Well, *The Changes* came out as a different version but [it goes back to literature with] *Lizzie Dripping* and things like that.

VB: It's easy to write something at that stage, maybe put down, 'The wizard appears and there's a puff of smoke,' but transferring that to television-

AH: Well, as I said earlier, you've got to be prepared to take it to pieces and recreate it, and also you do lose a lot of the language because you tell it in pictures. That's where authors find it difficult, to lose some of their words.

VB: Was there anything that you ever read and thought, 'That would be brilliant but that's just beyond our capabilities'?

AH: Yes, several times. *Watership Down*, which I turned down.

VB: It was proposed, was it?

AH: Oh, yes. And there was another one of that period, and then *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*.

VB: Oh, Mark Haddon?

AH: Yes, because Mark had written children's stuff but I had gone by then.

VB: He wrote *Agent Z* and *the Penguins from Mars*.

AH: Yes, yes.

VB: I've been watching that recently.

AH: I'd forgotten that's what it was called actually but yes, he did. *The Curious Incident* came out long after I was away from

[the BBC] but I read it as one would read something, and thought, 'For Christ's sake, how do you adapt this?' And when I first saw it at the National, I was completely blown away by it. It's a very, very clever adaptation and I read it again immediately after I'd seen it and it's almost verbatim, the text. It's extraordinary.

VB: So there were things that you wanted to do but the television at the time wasn't capable of it?

AH: Yes, so we couldn't afford it at all but as far as *Watership Down* was concerned, I didn't like it so we didn't do it.

VB: You didn't like the adaptation or you didn't like the book?

AH: No, I didn't like the book. I thought it was going to be a failure.

VB: Fair enough.

AH: And that happens. It's like publishers who turn down things that go on [to be successful].

VB: No, absolutely. I've seen interviews where, in reference to *The Box of Delights*, producers have said, 'We couldn't do this until now'. Were there things that you produced that were a long time coming in terms of fantasy and how you could actually portray that on-screen?

AH: Yes. Have you ever seen Pamela Lonsdale's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*?

VB: I have. I've seen bits of it because it's very hard to come across.

AH: Well, if you remember, that's sheets and things basically.

VB: But for 1967-

AH: Oh yes, it was pretty good for 1967, so there are some things that you do at certain times and you do them in different ways, according to where the technology. If you look at Aslan in our Narnia, he's pretty clunky but he works. At the time, he was quite extraordinary and he was manoeuvred by God knows how many people. It was a hugely expensive construct but a few years before you couldn't have done Aslan like that so I suppose each era [has its own interpretation]. I sometimes get angry about the number of remakes, both in the cinema and on television, but on the other hand if the technology allows you to do something different then I suppose that's a valid reason for doing it. You also interpret things in the context of the time in which they are being made, and particularly within film I think that happens.

VB: I was talking to Alex Kirby and he was saying that children's television fantasy drama in particular was very much on the cutting edge of technology because as soon as that technology became available, you thought, 'Well, what could we do with this?' and it immediately became incorporated. Would you say that's fair? Would you say that that's something that happened in the BBC or in TVS while you were there or was it very much a case of you wanted to do something so you found the [indistinguishable: way? Technology? Effect?]

AH: I think it was probably that. There were certain directors that were more interested in seeking out new ways of doing things.

VB: You made reference earlier on to children's fantasy drama as something that will put children in touch with another way of looking at the world. Was there ever a sense that it had to be educational or could it be purely entertainment?

AH: As far as I was concerned, it was entertainment first. However- There was always a sort of undertone of education

but much, much, much less than it is now. Now, they have to have an underpinning educational plan for most of the stuff that they do, certainly for pre-school. Again, this isn't relevant to your thesis but when we started Playschool, we had an elderly ex-teacher and that was it in terms of educational advisors so it's changed a lot. My argument always was that this is children's leisure; they've had school all day, they want to relax, I would like them to relax to something sometimes which is stimulating and would make you think but sometimes that is just pure rubbish. There is a wonderful essay by Peter Dickinson given at one of the Exeter Literature conferences, 'A Defence of Rubbish'.

VB: I will have a look and read it. I wanted to ask you briefly about how fantasy drama was produced. You mentioned Pamela Lonsdale's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* for ABC and that was wholly based in the studio and, early on, I would assume that a lot of the BBC production of drama was again in-studio because it's cheaper than going on location. Is that fair to say?

AH: It was then, but it ain't necessarily so now. Things have changed again because now a lot has gone back into studios but we did a lot out on location, as you know. That was before things like green screen really got going and we used to call it colour separation overlay.

VB: Or Chromakey, I believe.

AH: Chromakey, yes. So I think that's one of the reasons why we went out of the studio but also I think we wanted larger scale and more freedom and more reality within the fantasy, if you know what I mean.

VB: Yes, more verisimilitude to connect it.

AH: Yes.

VB: That makes a lot of sense. In terms of going out on location, did you have to pick and choose on whether you could afford it or did it just fit itself to the needs of the drama?

AH: When you were choosing a year's worth of stuff to do, you would look at the balance, both in terms of the content of the books and the style in which they were going to be done, so you had a balance and you worked your budget out so that you had the higher end and the lower end.

VB: Was it more likely that it would be on location if it was fantasy?

AH: No, it would depend on the nature of the story really and the scale of the story.

VB: If you had to bring the children's fantasy dramas that you have produced or executive produced into an historical overview, what would you say were the real technological shifts within those? Was there anything in particular that made your job easier?

AH: Well, as I say, I think the advent of green screen obviously had a huge impact, and I suppose the move from film to tape, in a way, and of course editing on tape. When I first started, you taped that like that [indicates physically taping together videotape], so the whole thing has gone forward. And what you can do in terms of post-production now, and even in the latter part of my career, that has changed hugely and become much, much more ambitious. Now, of course, you can do so much in post-production.

VB: Of course, at certain points in the late 70s and the 80s, it's easier to go out on a location shoot and do it on videotape with an outside broadcast van rather than on film or solely VT in studio.

AH: Yes. Yes, although the purists would say that never had the fluidity that film had but yes, it was.

VB: But I believe that Century Falls was produced on videotape.

AH: Yes, it was.

VB: And that's very intricate.

AH: Yes, I haven't looked at in years and years but yes, it was.

VB: In both ITV and BBC, did the idea of what a children's department should be and what children's television should be come down from the top, from the actual organisation, or was it something that came up within the department, that you organised or shared with others in the department?

AH: It certainly didn't come down from the top of the organisations in the sense of the Director-Generals or Controllers, or what have you. The Head of Department would have a pretty big impact and then I think there was a departmental ethos that would emanate from the head of department and the executive producers because there was always a group of executive producers, although as I say things like Blue Peter were always on their own.

VB: Like tent poles, almost.

AH: Yes.

VB: During the 1980s, not just in ITV but in the BBC as well, there was an increase in co-production. Do you think this makes it easier to produce drama or does it put constraints on it?

AH: It's much more difficult. The reason for entering into a co-production is obviously [for] money but it's much more difficult because you have to compromise and the more co-producers, the more you have to compromise. Making

programmes by committee is not a good idea. Some co-productions are fine, where they're nominal co-productions, where one person gets on with it, but it is quite hard. I think that Dramarama was interesting in as much as there was theoretically an overall executive producer but depending on who that was, they didn't necessarily interfere much and that's why they were so disparate really.

VB: Well, speaking of Dramarama, there's an awful lot of fantasy and the supernatural in Dramarama. Did that come about naturally, organically, or was it a lot of companies reacting to each other and to these programmes? Was it coincidental, I suppose, is what I'm asking?

AH: I think it was coincidental, yes. Again, TVS sort of co-ordinated, but it was quite difficult because people wanted to do their own thing really.

VB: But their own thing seems to have been a lot of fantasy and supernatural.

AH: Well, yes, I think it probably was in the air but there were some, there were silly things like that chicken. I can't remember what it's called: James Andrew Hall wrote it. ['Fowl Pest']

VB: I don't know if I've seen that one. There was one called 'My Mother is a Courgette', I think. ['My Mum's a Courgette']

AH: There were a lot of them.

VB: But in the IBA minutes for the Children's Sub-Committee around the late 1970s, it says there's a rash of quote, psycho horror, which I thought was a rather lovely phrase but it's true: there does seem to be that zeitgeist of, at the time, children's television having a very strong supernatural vein.

AH: Well, I suppose this happens. Think about the present with all the vampires around. It goes in phases.

VB: Absolutely. Okay, a question that I don't think we've covered: do you think that fantasy was represented in schedules all the year round or was it more likely to be used at specific points?

AH: You put your goodies in the autumn and winter, before and after Christmas; that's where you put your major dramas because that's when you were going to get your major audiences.

VB: Because the nights were drawing in.

AH: Right, and in the summer you would, and they still do, rely mainly on repeats.

VB: In terms of summer programming, I don't know whether you'll be able to answer this, but when do you think that summer holiday programming really made an impact? In the early 1970s, as far as I'm aware, there wasn't really any kind of organised [summer] schedule and yet by the 1980s you've got things like *But First This*, which is your summer holiday schedule: regular presenters, location shooting for the presentation. When do you think summer schedules start taking effect?

AH: Well, it certainly wasn't in my day, so I think you'd have to ask somebody else because I honestly don't know about that.

VB: Fair enough. That's fine. Did you also get involved in Saturday morning programming?

AH: Yes. In the BBC again, Saturday morning programming had really come out of *Blue Peter* and it was very much again a thing on its own. Really, I let them get on with it more or less and it ran itself. Yes, you used to go to the studio and you spent

time talking obviously to the producers of all the stuff that you were responsible for but basically they could get on with it. It was a formula that worked and you left it alone all the time that it worked, but when things don't work you have to change. One of the things that I had to do when I came back from TVS was kill Playschool which was extremely difficult to do. I got a lot of flak in the press, but it had had its day. You've got to be aware of things that have had their day and, I'll tell you, every single new head of department that goes into BBC Children's wants to kill Blue Peter, the icon.

VB: Do you think that will ever happen?

AH: Yes, I think so, eventually. You look at it now and it's kind of eroding and eroding but the nostalgia factor is so big. What's really interesting is now that it's moved off the main channel, its viewing figures have gone right down because the people who were watching it were the elderly.

VB: It did serve as a bridge, didn't it, on the terrestrial schedule?

AH: Yes, but going back to Saturday morning, No. 73, which was John Dale again, was a real breakthrough programme in Saturday morning programming and I was involved in that. It was quite controversial and you never sure what was going to happen next. Nigel Kennedy dropping his trousers on live television on Saturday morning was the sort of thing you had to field but it was great. It was very interesting and look what it produced in terms of presenters: Sandi Toksvig, Andrea Arnold, Neil Buchanan, and the other boy who is now an Oscar-winning film composer [Patrick Doyle]. Andrea, of course, is an Oscar-winning film director and when you think about Andrea whizzing around on roller skates on Saturday mornings and then Fish Tank [indistinguishable: took off?]

VB: I just wanted to ask about a couple of programmes that you've been involved in, just to see if you've got any specific memories. I want to start with *Mandog* because it's a fairly unusual drama, in that it involves representations of disability at a time when there weren't many. It also involves this idea of rebellion and there are very strong female characters, so I was wondering if you could remember anything about it?

AH: *Mandog* was a commission and Peter was, is - he must still be alive because I haven't heard that he isn't but he must be very old now - I think, one of the most interesting and imaginative writers of his time. He started as a writer of adult thrillers and then he was a sub-editor on *Punch* for years and years. He's an aristocrat, very upper-class; a really interesting man. I was always for trying to break boundaries and to do new things and to do them differently and I always wanted to go that bit further than had been gone before. Someone like Peter, if you gave him something and said 'Just go at it,' you would get something really unusual and that's where that came from really. Again if you think about *The Changes* it was very ahead of its time. The film editor who edited *The Changes* has just sent me several episodes which he's managed to copy from somewhere. He said, 'If you look at again, it's so contemporary.'

VB: So you wanted to push boundaries and Peter would do that for you. Was there anything that you wanted to see in *Mandog* or did you just say, 'Go wild'?

AH: I think we probably talked a bit about disability but disability was talked about in a completely different way in those days, so it wasn't a big issue. If you think about children's television in the 50s and 60s it was very, very narrow so what we really wanted to do, and hence *Grange Hill* really, was open it out to a much broader consensus of the population and to

make it more relevant to a wider audience: less middle-class basically. What's interesting now is that if you look at children's television it's gone back to being middle-class again. Apart from Tracy Beaker, there's not much else.

VB: I think that's fair. If you look at something like The Sarah Jane Adventures, which I love-

AH: Me too.

VB: But again, it's very much set in that middle-class expectation of 'here is your school, here is your mother, here is your nice, big fancy house, etc.' So, basically Mandog was looking for new ways to express children's television?

AH: Yes, and I think most of things we did round then was trying to have a go really and to do something differently, to tell slightly different stories as well as keeping the classics there, but then going beyond the classics so that it was a wider remit.

VB: A Traveller in Time. I haven't been able to find much about this because it seems to have pretty much disappeared from the radar, but I love Alison Uttley's book.

AH: Well, that was Dorothea, of course.

VB: Yes. Do you have any memories of that or was it just something you were involved in at a distance?

AH: Well, at a distance. I can remember going to the location because it was filmed on the farm, the actual farm, and one of the Blue Peter presenters' parents-

VB: Simon Groom?

AH: Simon, that's right. Simon Groom: it was his parents' farm and he still talks about it. I don't remember much more about it than that.

VB: Fair enough. But it was shot on location?

AH: Yes, it was and it was film, and it was lovely. You say it doesn't still exist?

VB: I think there might be something in the BFI. I've been in contact with them recently and they said they have something but they're not sure what and they might be able to get stuff out of the BBC archives but, again, it's not really very clear.

AH: I'll get Chris Rowlands to have a look. Chris, this film editor I was talking about, has suddenly got really interested in going back into the BBC archive and seeing what's there.

VB: That would be marvellous because there's so much we just don't know. The Bells of Astercote?

AH: Gosh, yes, Penelope Lively.

VB: Again, something that there's not a huge amount of information on.

AH: I don't remember anything about it, I have to say. I remember doing it but that's it. Was that Marilyn?

VB: I think it was, yes.

AH: It's very sad Marilyn died so young because she was a fantastic [producer].

VB: Yes, and of course she did the first Narnia and so many other things as well.

AH: But Marilyn was extremely fraught and unconfident. She used to ring me up at two o'clock in the morning to say, 'I can't do it, I can't do it'; anyway she did it very well.

VB: In terms of The Bells of Astercote, one of the questions you might be able to answer was do you consider it fantasy?

AH: Kind of.

VB: Does it hover on that boundary?

AH: Yes, it is on the boundary, and you could say the same thing of Lizzie Dripping which hovers between reality and fantasy.

VB: Or *The Secret World of Polly Flint*. Again, it seems to be girls on that precipice of adolescence and the rift between reality and imagination which I think is really interesting. But anyway, that's me pontificating.

AH: No, it is interesting. Penelope Lively, obviously, if you've read her adult novels as well, she's obsessed with this time and layers of time and time slipping and all that stuff. It came out in those early books and has continued to do so.

VB: There seems to be a lot of that sort of narrative in children's television: time travel, time slippage, *A Traveller in Time*, *The Owl Service*-

AH: I would really like to remake *The Owl Service*; it's such a terrific story. Our *Elidor* was a mess, I thought, the most recent version.

VB: I haven't been able to see that because again it's not really out on DVD and it's very difficult to get hold of.

AH: I'm sure the director has it somewhere.

VB: You've already talked about *The Changes*. Lizzie Dripping: that was developed for television by Helen Cresswell. Do I have that right? And then novelisations come-

AH: Yes, later.

VB: But it was pretty much purely a televisual story.

AH: Originally, yes. I think she may have written one short story to begin with; I can't remember now. It was basically about her village. She died about four years ago but she lived in Old Church Farm which was next to the churchyard, which is Lizzie Dripping's churchyard. The grave that the witch sits on is

there and the tree that the witch is found in is there, and Lizzie Dripping is a local name for a girl who has too much imagination, really.

VB: And it is very much tied to that idea of locality, isn't it, Lizzie Dripping?

AH: Well, that's very much Helen. She was really very interested in all of that: place was very important to her. If you think about Alison Uttley and what have you, Helen came very much from that same tradition and had been very influenced by people like Alison Uttley.

VB: Orion, the fantasy musical?

AH: God, Orion. You need to talk to Jeremy about that.

VB: Jeremy Swan, is that?

AH: I can get you to him as well.

VB: Anyone who's willing to talk to me, I'd be delighted but I don't want to impose.

AH: Oh, he'll be very happy to talk to you. Jeremy has the most fantastic memory. Why did we do Orion? God knows.

VB: Why a musical for a start?

AH: Well, I know. I don't know; I cannot remember the genesis. He will. All I can remember is sitting in an O.B. van outside the Anna Scher Theatre on the last day of recording and we were about to overrun. They were about to pull the plugs out and I remember that very, very vividly. [AH later contacted me to say that she had confused Orion with Ain't Many Angels.]

VB: Bit of a fraught production, then, perhaps?

AH: It was, a little.

VB: Dark Season and Century Falls are pretty much covered from Russell T. Davies's perspective in his *Writer's Tales*, his

own writing. Is there anything specific that you remember about them?

AH: No, apart from the fact that they were going out on a limb in a big way and they did cause a lot of fuss.

VB: That was around the period when, I believe, Michael Fallon was calling children's television 'brazen, wicked and sinister'.

AH: Wicked, brazen and sinister. Never mind. We did an interview on Newsnight: Jeremy Paxman interviewed me on Newsnight and he didn't like Michael Fallon any more than I did.

VB: I'll have a look for that. Kin of the Castle?

AH: Sorry?

VB: Kin of the Castle. It had Joely Richardson in it and was apparently about an immortal family who lived in a castle. Again, very little information.

AH: Was that in my time?

VB: I think so. I don't think I've put down the dates. Okay, well, how about The Haunting of Cassie Palmer? Again, it pushes the boundaries because you've got this figure that appears that is implied to be the Devil, which again could be seen as 'brazen, sinister and wicked'. So do you remember anything about that?

AH: Oh, yes, I remember Cassie Palmer very well but, you see, at the time you didn't really think too much about the implications, you just thought it was a bloody good story. That was Vivien, wasn't it? Vivien Alcock?

VB: Yes.

AH: And was that Dorothea?

VB: Again, sorry. I've a terrible memory for production staff.

AH: I think it was. Was that TVS?

VB: Yes.

AH: Yes, I think that was the first drama we ever did at TVS and it was shot around Hastings and that area.

VB: I'm aware that we're close to winding this up but Alex Kirby said something interesting. He said that there could have been a BBC production of *The Hobbit* after the *Chronicles of Narnia* but it all fell apart in negotiations. Was that the case?

AH: I don't know because I don't think that was me. It may well have been the case but the person who would probably know is Paul. Paul is still alive but he doesn't communicate anymore so I can't help you there.

VB: No, that's absolutely fine. You've been more than helpful. The Moon Stallion or Moondial?

AH: Loved both of them. The Moon Stallion, I think, was one of the lost treasures of children's television really. That was Dorothea.

VB: And again it's this interesting idea of a child with physical disabilities.

AH: Yes. The Moon Stallion was extraordinary. It was filmed on location all around the white horse and I can remember one night shoot up on the Ridgeway in Weylands's Smithy, an old fortification, and it was extraordinary. I don't really believe – well, I sort of do - in the other world but, my God, it was close that night. It was an extraordinary atmosphere. It wasn't helped by the fact that there was a drunken floor manager as well. And this horse rearing up was amazing. Of course, the actor who played the baddie has become a great star now [David Haig?]. It's interesting, isn't it? I haven't thought about it in the way

that you're thinking about it but I think what's interesting is the cracks between our world and the fantasy world, for a child, they aren't so separate. And I think that's what comes out of the best children's writers, actually.

VB: Well, I got a lot of that out of children's television when I was younger: things like *Children of Green Knowe*, particularly.

AH: Yes, we originally did *Children of Green Knowe* as bits and pieces for *Jackanory*.

VB: I read your *Into the Box of Delights* and I think you said that you were doing little filmed inserts.

AH: Yes, we did.

VB: And I think you did them at Lucy M. Boston's house?

AH: Yes, which is *Green Knowe*. She was still alive then and she was the most terrifying woman. She was like a witch, she really was, and I'll always remember her saying to me, 'Well, dear, you can use the lavatory but the men must go down the road to the public lavatory.' And then by the end of the first day, the cameramen were in the house and she was making them a cake!

VB: Fantastic. One last question: is there anything that you wish you could have made, particularly in terms of fantasy drama, or something that another company made and you've thought, 'I wish I'd got my hands on that first.'

AH: Probably but at the moment I can't think of anything. I'm sure there are lots of things. I would have liked to have done *The Owl Service* but I'll have a think and if I can think of anything else, I'll let you know.

VB: That's brilliant. Thanks you very much; I think that's all the questions I've got. Thanks so much for your time.

Lewis Rudd: phone interview Wed 10th July, 2013

VB: I read that you started off at Granada after you left university and then you went to Associated Rediffusion, which is where you got started in children's television. Is that correct?

LR: Yes, but there's quite a long period when I was at Associated Rediffusion, which later became just Rediffusion, when I was a researcher and then a producer in current affairs programmes. So I think the actual chronology was I joined Associated Rediffusion at the beginning of 1961 and I didn't move into children's programmes until the end of 1966.

VB: And how did that move come about?

LR: Ah, oddly enough I've just been writing this in a piece for an esteemed and not very academic publication, *The Film and TV Veteran*. I'll do it in brief for you. I'd gone almost as far as I wanted in features except that I kept on being passed over for the job of producer for *This Week*, which was the flagship current affairs weekly programme. I'd worked on *This Week* as assistant editor and in various other roles, then I took on and produced other programmes in the current affairs features portfolio but I'd been turned down a couple of times by Cyril Bennett, who was then the boss [producer and later Rediffusion's Controller of Programmes], for the job on *This Week*. Eventually I said to Cyril, 'Have I any chance of getting it?' and he said, 'No, I don't think you're up to the job,' or words to that effect. A week later, the head of children's programmes resigned and they offered me the job, obviously as a sort of sop, knowing that I was a discontented person who wasn't happy with their lot. The way I usually tell the story, which is true, is that I was walking up from Temple tube station to Rediffusion at the bottom of Kingsway and Cyril's Rolls purred to a halt next to me. He beckoned me in, tapped the front

page of the Daily Mail where the important news of the resignation of the head of children's programmes had actually made the front page for some weird reason, and said, 'Do you want the job?' My gloss on it is whoever Cyril first saw as he was coming in in his car was going to get that job. The real message is that I hadn't any experience of children's; I was made head of department without any real experience of children's programming.

VB: Did you have an interest in children's department before that?

LR: Well, the other part of the story is that we'd just discovered that my wife was pregnant with our first child so my reasoning was that I was going to have to take an interest in children at home, I might as well take an interest at work and get paid for it.

VB: Okay; grand.

LR: So it all sounds a bit cynical but that's how it happened.

VB: Well, you were in charge of children's at Associated Rediffusion for quite a while. How do you feel drama was part of the children's output?

LR: It wasn't that long. I might send you this piece actually although I don't think it's all that good.

VB: I'd be fascinated to read it.

LR: I don't think anybody else will! But I got this job in December 1966; I think I officially took over then. Rediffusion found out they'd lost the contract in something like June 1967. Do you know the history of ITV in that period?

VB: I'm familiar with it but I wouldn't say I'm an expert.

LR: What happened was that Rediffusion and ABC were put together in a shotgun wedding into the company that eventually

became Thames, but with ABC with 50.1% and Rediffusion with 49.9. In other words, it was ABC's company and not Rediffusion's in spite of an almost equal split in the ownership. By July 1967, I'd been in the job about eight months so there was a period of uncertainty about the future; there was no guarantee that my department was going to continue into the new company. The actual handover was the end of July 1968, so I was only actually in the job at Rediffusion for less than two years, and as I say, for most of that period we had this uncertainty or death sentence that had been delivered by the ITA.

VB: This uncertainty and the contract changes, do you think that affected production of what you were doing?

LR: In the end, it didn't as much as all that. It created this period of uncertainty but I must say Rediffusion behaved quite well. On the whole, companies behaved quite well when they were in their dying days, when ITV franchises were changed. Mind you, they were always rich companies but they behaved quite well. Rediffusion behaved particularly well in that, although we were losing executives who'd been part of other people's bids for Yorkshire and LWT, although people were disappearing, we didn't get programme budgets cut. In fact, and I haven't mentioned this yet in this piece I'm writing, the last six weeks that Rediffusion was on-air were billed as 'Out like a lion!', that sort of PR campaign. We saved up some of our strongest programmes for that period, so there would be some really good programmes on the air as Rediffusion bit the dust. In the event, the companies' programmes dovetailed quite well. I will email you this piece actually, however terrible it is. I don't know how many people are going to find it interesting but you might.

VB: No, I absolutely will. I'd be very, very grateful to be able to read it.

LR: It's for a magazine called *The Veteran* which I don't think is very easy to obtain unless you're a veteran.

VB: I'll keep an eye out for it; that would be grand.

LR: I'll email you the piece in its current form; it may change a bit by the time it gets printed anyway.

VB: Thank you very much. So how much would you say that drama was part of children's television in those early years?

LR: Well, this is something that I've not actually researched for the other companies but when I came into Rediffusion, they did a programme called *Orlando* fifty-one weeks a year with a break at Christmas. Have you come across *Orlando* in your researches?

VB: I haven't watched it but I'm familiar with it: a crime serial, wasn't it?

LR: No, well, you won't have but you've seen the name, have you?

VB: Yes.

LR: It was a spin-off for children of an adult drama series called *Crane*, which sometimes happens and happens in children's programmes particularly when children's programmes didn't have a separate person running them. Orlando had been the sidekick character in *Crane* and was made the main adult character in *Orlando*. I quite liked *Orlando*: it wasn't a bad series. It was adventure with quite a lot of comedy in it and it was on a very tight schedule, as you can imagine, because it was weekly. What happened was you filmed any inserts on film rather than tape, in those days, so any exteriors were done on film on Monday; you then went into the rehearsal room for

three days; then the set went into the studio on Thursday morning and you rehearsed in studio Thursday afternoon; and then more rehearsal and recording on Friday. It was a very tight turnaround with the actors getting a script at the weekend for filming on Monday when they didn't have a clue what was going on. Well, they did but it was very tight, but that was the way we did it. One of the things I did when I came in is I wanted to break up the drama a bit. Of the two programmes I've mentioned today, one was about a young reporter on a provincial newspaper called *Send Foster*, which was my own idea although not my title, which was a *good* title. The other thing was that the BBC always did these semi-classics: *Five Children and It*, *The Secret Garden* and things, and not only did they always do those but they seemed to re-do them every few years. They seemed to do a fresh production every few years so there was no point in trying to get into that area, so I decided that I'd do an adaptation of a modern children's book although the first one I chose was one by Leon Garfield. I think I mentioned this to you the other days, did I?

VB: Yes, was it *Scarf Jack*? No. I thought it was *Scarf Jack* but I don't think it's that one.

LR: No, no, that was much later and that's not by Leon Garfield. That was when I was at Southern and it's by P.J. Kavanagh. Leon Garfield's first and award-winning book was *Jack Holborn*, which won the Guardian children's fiction award and because of that, I noticed that he'd got a new book out called *Devil in the Fog*. With some ease, I managed to get the television rights; it was much easier in those days. [People fell over themselves to make over the rights to publishers?] whereas now, you know, everything's a potential *Harry Potter*. [You'll have great trouble getting television rights for something that's reasonably popular and affordable?] So I had those two new dramas and then I also replaced *Orlando* with a long-running,

but not as long-running, programme over twenty-six weeks, and that was *Sexton Blake*. Do you know the *Sexton Blake* property?

VB: Isn't it a detective serial?

LR: Yes, it was originally a sort of rip-off of *Sherlock Holmes* written by a variety of authors for children's comics: not strip comics but comics with children's stories in them. I'd been approached by the publishers who were the rights-holders, and the interesting thing about it was that it had been written over different periods so you could set it in pretty well any period. We decided to set it in the late Twenties which meant that you had interesting cars and things, so it was quite an interesting thing to do. Again, like *Devil in the Fog*, it was period and there was terribly little period drama around in the mid-sixties done in peak time, so there was quite a buzz when you did a period drama in the studio with sets and costumes.

VB: Quite a few of these seem to be adaptations. Would you say that adaptations for drama were quite important to ITV as well?

LR: Yes, I expect there was a certain cachet to adaptations. Now, remember this is the era of brownie points and people trying to make sure they looked like public service broadcasters. I think there was a slight bias in favour of something that would encourage children to read so there was that in it. *Send Foster* was a television original, *Orlando* was based on a television original as a spin-off of *Crane*, but so far as I recall that had never been a book. I had a leaning towards adaptations. I had a theory that quite a lot of television is written by writers who work in pairs, particularly comedy probably, but quite a lot of it is. In a way, you have a team writing it when somebody adapts another person's book. You often get this thing where writers are unwilling to murder their babies: writers often get attached to them. Somebody adapting their book will often arguably

improve the book by saying, ‘Well, that doesn’t really work; we’ll get rid of that.’ Of course, television adaption also has to take account of the practicalities of television production, so there may be wonderful scenes which would work but which we can’t afford to do, so they go for that reason.

VB: Then it became Thames and when you were at Thames, you were still head of the children’s department, I believe. There was quite a lot of really, really well-known drama being produced by Thames during that period as well, one of which was *Ace of Wands*. Is that correct?

LR: Yes, now that was a television original! It came from the writer Trevor Preston and the producer he worked with a lot, Pamela Lonsdale. It might be worth talking to Pamela actually because ABC had done very little children’s, but one rather good thing they’d done had been an excellent, very shoestring production of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, which Pamela had produced and directed. That was adapted by Trevor Preston. They were very key people in my department; they were the key people who’d come from the other side. I’m not quite sure whose idea it was but we did *Professor Branestawm*; do you know the *Professor Branestawm* books?

VB: I’ve read about it but again there’s very little available evidence. I think it was about an inventor, is that correct?

LR: That’s right. They’re written by a guy called Norman Hunter but it’s the illustrations which everyone always remembers and which made them popular children’s books, and they were by Heath Robinson who was an illustrator who was great on weird inventions. Although the inventions were written by the writer, they were realised visually throughout the book. So they did that, and then Trevor came up with the idea of *Ace of Wands*. *Ace of Wands* was sort of borderline fantasy. If you get hold of Trevor or Pamela, they may say something

frightfully different, but I understood at that time as we were always discussing this that the hero was a stage magician - David Blaine, Paul Daniels, whatever – but he did things which you could imagine that a magician could do but they couldn't *necessarily* do. We didn't stick to tricks that people could do in real life, which could actually be done, so you were meant to believe that he was not a supernatural magician but an incredibly skilled magician and he used this in detective work.

VB: Yes, but he was in touch with the supernatural though, I believe, because I've seen series three.

LR: As I say, it was sort of borderline fantasy, borderline supernatural. He came across these sorts of things, but he wasn't actually a genuine magic magician, he was actually an incredibly skilful stage magician.

VB: Yes, absolutely. *Ace of Wands* also seems to take advantage of that early 1970s aesthetic where there's a lot more film being used in children's television, and it's alternating with video tape.

LR: Yes, we were still very limited. If you've looked at [indistinguishable] recently, which I haven't, my memory particularly was that when I moved to Southern, Southern were much more generous with the film component of their children's dramas than Thames had been. I think we were, so far as I remember, still only doing one day of filming per half hour episode and the rest was in studio. I'm pretty certain I'm right in that.

VB: Well, the thing is I think the first episode, 'The Meddlers', gives the idea that the entire series is maybe much more expansive in terms of film than it necessarily is, because it's so striking. The film sequences are so localised, I guess, because you go out into local streets, so maybe that's where I'm getting that. But it does seem very-

LR: Yes, we may have sort of juggled the film, you know: thirteen days of filming across thirteen episodes a bit. Thames though, in a lot of ways, inherited from ABC a system of control by the facilities departments over production departments and it was very difficult to break loose from of that. Southern was, in some ways, better than that. Southern, at this time, were doing a programme called *Freewheelers* which did have two to three days of filming per episode and I remember that being a real luxury compared with anything I'd been doing at Thames, except for a couple of things. There was one thing that didn't come under my department at all which Mike Hodges directed called *The Tyrant King*, which was a sort of almost co-production with what was then London Transport. The book was published under London Transport's aegis, and there was a thing I was thoroughly ashamed of called *Wreckers at Dead Eye*, which for some reason I managed to get the money for to do as a period piece entirely on film. But it really took television drama back fifty years.

VB: I'm sure that's not true!

LR: Well, I wasn't terribly pleased to have done it as my first all-film programme. *The Tyrant King* came under the Drama Department for some reason and I'd have been much more proud to be associated with *The Tyrant King* than with *Wreckers at Dead Eye*. Now, those were adventures that were going to film, 16mm not 35 mm, and that was a bit of a breakthrough. Other companies had done more stuff on film: Granada had done something with a fellow trainee called Peter Plummer-

VB: Was it *The Owl Service*?

LR: You've come across him, have you?

VB: Yes, Peter Plummer did *The Owl Service* and then later *The Intruder*.

LR: That's right: I was just going to say that. Alan Garner's [indistinguishable] adaptation; that was it. That was on film, as I remember, wasn't it?

VB: Yes, it was and all on location.

LR: I remember when Yorkshire started, which was a little bit later, I think in 1968, they did *Tom Grattan's War* which was all film. So different companies did different things, but on the whole at Thames, as I said, our basic output was still 80% studio, 20% shot in one day on film, and that's going it because then you were getting five minutes in a day which was quite hard going.

VB: Do you feel it was harder to produce children's drama in studio? Would you have liked to have had more film?

LR: Yes, I always sort of resented it because I always felt that children's drama, even more than adult drama, needed action as opposed to 'two boards and a passion'. Adult drama can be entirely dialogue, two people in a room, but you can't do that with children's drama. You need some form of action and activity, so we were always a bit hamstrung by the fact that we were trying to do so much in the studio. On the other hand, as I said to you before, I also didn't want the too obvious shaky sets and trying to do things which we really hadn't got the money or the time to do effectively. With an enormous budget, you could have done stuff in the studio that we just weren't equipped to do.

VB: So you were operating under the constraints of available resources and budget but you were still trying to produce quality drama for children. So after Thames, you went to Southern, and at Southern, you had a lot of hats to wear, is that right?

LR: A lot of what?

VB: Hats to wear. You were a controller-

LR: Well, I was assistant controller of programmes, yes. Well, I was approached by Southern because they wanted somebody to head up all their non-regional, non-current affairs output. It was always a bit of an irony because my second hat was still current affairs and I didn't get much chance to use that at Southern, although I was one of two assistant controllers of programmes. The other guy had not only all the regional output which was current affairs but also such network output as the occasional documentaries and things. On the other hand, I had things like cooking. Cooking counts as adult education and wasn't as big then as it is now. Religion came under my purview and adult drama. We all did some adult drama, at some point eventually. We did do a network peak time series about the army called Spearhead, which I was quite proud of. On the other hand, their main network programming had been children's and that's why they thought that I was a good fit with them, so probably at least fifty per cent of the programming I was responsible for would have been children's at Southern.

VB: But I understand also that Southern wasn't really a Major ITV company?

LR: No.

VB: So was the children's output a deliberate plan to get try and get onto the national network?

LR: Yes, not just a deliberate plan by regional companies but also a deliberate plan from the point of view of the Major Companies. The Major Companies were specific designates: you couldn't move your status. Southern felt rather resentful of the whole network setup because Southern often would be ahead in terms of its advertising revenue, which is a very nice situation for the shareholders. There were five Major Companies but Southern, if you looked up advertising revenue,

would sometimes rank out of all the companies fourth or fifth, rather than sixth which it should have been. It was always ahead of Yorkshire and sometimes ahead of LWT in terms of advertising revenue. It had a lot of money and Southern would get chastised by the IBA for not spending enough money on programmes; on the other hand, it was difficult getting them on the network and one of the things that Southern were encouraged to do both by the network and the IBA was children's programmes. So they'd made themselves a niche in children's programmes and that was a mixture of the company's own ambitions and also the way the system worked.

VB: Oh, right. So there was encouragement coming down from the IBA to get into children's television?

LR: Yes, I'm sure. That had already happened before I joined. The ITA/IBA was very ambiguous in its attitudes toward regional companies: you ought to be doing more but the system, which the IBA didn't help to break up, meant it was very difficult. I was talking to Brian Young the other day and TVS, in the estimation of Brian Young, was not as successful a company as it expected to be. The one thing Jimmy Gatward did was get to some do at No. 10 and have a go at Thatcher about how badly the regional companies were treated. As a result, regional companies did get more access from then on, but up to that period, which was into the 80s, the regional companies would be asked 'Why aren't you doing more?' by the IBA. At the same time, they were being asked, 'Why the hell are you doing anything at all?' by the Major Companies, who preferred to carve up the network between the five of them.

VB: So was children's television an important part of contract negotiations then when contract changes came around?

LR: One never really knew. Of course, it was part of the stuff that people obviously stressed their strength in it when the

franchise came up but I would say it was more important for a company like Southern than it was for a company like Thames, because a greater percentage of Thames' output would be peak-time programming.

VB: Yeah, absolutely. Well, as I think as I said to you in my email, my thesis is about children's television fantasy drama, which is basically science fiction, fantasy, anything vaguely supernatural that crops up on children's television. You've been involved in quite a lot of programmes that involve the supernatural or the unusual or the fantastic: how do you feel those programmes fit into children's television for ITV as a whole?

LR: Well, I think I look back over what I've done and I'm not sure I did too much fantasy, but I often think I did too much comedy and I would like to have done more of the more realistic programmes than I did. I expect I was very pleased to do *Press Gang* and *Murphy's Mob*, which I'd done before that which had a more realistic approach dealing with believable events and believable emotions. Fantasy's a bit of an obvious area for children and as television techniques, like the use of Chromakey, blue-screen, whatever you called it, and different techniques developed, it became easier to do different forms of fantasy as well. I always had this underlying idea, as I said to you before, that fantasy works best when it's against a realistic background so *Worzel Gummidge* was a prime example: the scarecrow who comes to life. Yes, it's comedy but I used to get uneasy when James Hill, who produced and directed *Worzel Gummidge*, would do something like suddenly putting in a steam train. I would think, 'You don't want to do that.' *Worzel Gummidge* had an interesting background in terms of its origin: it came to me as a package with the rights to the book, Jon Pertwee as lead, and the writers Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall, who were excellent writers. Their initial script had the

children turning up for this farm holiday, thinking they're going to have a lovely time on the sort of farm everyone dreams about and, in fact, the farm is very much a state of the art factory farm with loads of animals inside sheds and battery chickens. I'm not sure if they actually had battery chickens but that was the whole sort of ethos of it. Then the relief comes when they discover that the scarecrow talks and it's not going to be so bad after all. It was quite a clever idea: it isn't there in the books. However, this factory farm was going to be a very dull, downbeat background to the story once it turned into a series so the thing that we did get Keith and Willis to change was to make it into much more of a fantasy farm. And the farm *was* a bit fantasy farm, with chickens scratching around in the yard and every sort of animal so it was like a farm in a children's picture book and not like a modern farm. I always felt we had to be careful where we were in period because it was meant to be happening in the 1970s when it was being shot, you know? Then suddenly I find Jimmy has decided he's going to shoot this train sequence on a steam train. God, why have we got a steam train in here?

VB: You said something yesterday about how you felt fantasy often worked best when it was just an element of fantasy against a realistic background.

LR: That's right, which in a way *Worzel* was because it's about a scarecrow coming to a life in a real setting. As I say, the setting then became romanticised rather than purely fantasy. The same with things like *Woof!*, which was based on a book although it was quite a short book and that only made a four-parter which we started with. With something like *Woof!*, he was an ordinary boy with an ordinary background going to an ordinary school and that's the whole point: that against this, he's turning into a dog.

VB: Absolutely. In terms of the production of *Woof!*, I know that you said that American companies interested in potential co-production were expecting more in the way of effects from *Woof!* Did you feel constrained by the effects that were available to you or did you chose to use those effects in a very specific way?

LR: I thought the transformations would look rather horrible if we actually had a lot of money to do them. There was a film around at the time called *The Company of Wolves* where you saw people turning into wolves and I thought those actual transformations, watching them, was rather horrific. I think even if I'd had the money, I would certainly not have wanted that. The point was that he was more like Superman going into a phone box and coming out: it was more like that and that's how we wanted it to be. Also, he didn't control it which was wonderful, [indistinguishable] that he didn't know when he was going to turn into a dog. The odd script cheated on that a bit from time to time but basically it wasn't in his power, but in terms of fantasy, the point was what it would be like for a boy to be a dog, not what it would be like for a boy to experience turning into a dog.

VB: There are a couple of other programmes I just wanted to ask you about but I'm conscious that we've hit thirty-five minutes.

LR: No, go on.

VB: Well, one of the things I really wanted to ask you about was *Noah's Castle* because I love that. I've seen it on DVD several times.

LR: Oh, good!

VB: And I've actually done a paper on it recently for a small research group at university but again it seems to fit into this

model you described of one fantastic thing against a realistic background. *Noah's Castle* takes the economic problems of the late 1970s and pushes them just that little bit further.

LR: Well, what was remarkable about that is the book was not written at that time. It was terribly contemporary at the time we did it but the book had been written about ten years before. It was quite prophetic, the book.

VB: I knew it was an adaptation but I didn't know when it was written.

LR: It was John Rowe Townsend. Well, that's why we alighted on the book because this was around the time that Thatcher was just about to become prime minister but Thatcher was famous for the fact that she'd said that she had a store cupboard full of food against the time when the revolution came. This was before she was prime minister, I think, possibly when she was leader of the opposition. There was this feeling that we were going to reach this era because of this hyperinflation, and it would end with the haves having to barricade themselves against the have-nots. It was a sort of fantasy but it was also a sort of 'what-if' reality, because the main character, although I don't think he had been in the book, was this sort of Thatcherite: 'there's no such thing as society, it's us against them, and I'm jolly well going to barricade myself against the world.' That was an actual contemporary state of mind. I always felt that, partly because it was right at the end of the Southern franchise and Southern was therefore fading away, that it didn't have much impact at the time. I'm sure it did on some people who saw it, but-

VB: Well, it's recently come out on DVD and, as I said, I bought it and I watched it and I loved it, because it was totally not what I was expecting. It just seemed so much more hard-

hitting and it seemed to use a lot of realistic conventions of drama that I wasn't expecting.

LR: It was a really good director, Colin Nutley, who did that. He had a rather complicated life in that he had a Swedish wife and spent a lot of time in Sweden, then eventually moved to Sweden and split up with his Swedish wife, who was the only reason he'd been spending so much time in Sweden! But he became a very successful director of mainly comedy feature films in Sweden, one of which did quite well internationally. It had *Angel* in the title; you might be able to find it in a catalogue. He was a very good director. The other thing which I was glad of which he did was something that Phil Redmond of *Hollyoaks* and *Brookside* fame wrote for us called *Going Out*. Have you come across that?

VB: Yes, I've read a couple of articles about it and I've seen one of the episodes. It's really at the forefront of what becomes teenage drama in the 1980s, I think.

LR: Yes. It was a decision to make a no-holds teenage drama, and of course we had no idea where it was going to be transmitted. Actually Southern after I'd left, because I left before the end of Southern, put it out at 11.30 at night. We'd said it was post-watershed and nobody was going to put it out at 9 o'clock because 9 o'clock was always the one-hour slot for adult drama. ATV/Central, which I'd moved to, put it out straight after *News at Ten* which was still too late but Southern, for reasons I never understood, put it out at 11.30 at night to make sure nobody saw it at all. I think they got terribly nervous about it, which was pointless because they were losing the franchise anyway so it didn't matter whether they offended the IBA! Everyone at Southern was ridiculously nervous about it. It was quite something, but we said to Phil, 'Don't worry about time; we'll put it out after the watershed.' Colin then also did

something for me at Central, a Swedish co-production called *Annika*, which was three-part serial teenage story about a love affair between a working-class English boy and a middle-class Swedish girl, which was based on Colin's own life. It was written by him and a Swedish co-writer and Central, under Charles Denton who was then my boss, put it out in a legitimate nine o'clock slot so it went out at absolutely the right time.

VB: I do think that *Going Out* actually inspired other teen-oriented dramas. I was talking to Bob Baker who did a lot of work on *Doctor Who* and a lot of work for HTV West on children's drama and he said that his early 1980s teenage drama, *Jangles*, was directly influenced by this teenage programme that went out really late at night that Southern had done. I'm assuming that was *Going Out*.

LR: I don't know; maybe it should have waited and gone out on Channel Four. I don't know if it ever got repeated on Channel Four. I lost any control of it because it was nothing to do with me once I was just being a salaried staff person. I was, by then, nothing to do with anything that Southern had done. Obviously, I couldn't influence when they transmitted it but it's the sort of thing that you might have thought Channel Four would find a reasonable slot for.

VB: Absolutely. Just returning to *Noah's Castle* really, really quickly, I've been reading through the IBA/ITA children's subcommittee minutes.

LR: God.

VB: Yes, it's a bit of a slog. I know that you took *Noah's Castle* to the network children's subcommittee a couple of times; is that right?

LR: Gosh, how did you get hold of these? I didn't know these things existed. I haven't got those minutes anymore.

VB: They're actually a part of the ITA/IBA archive at the University of Bournemouth.

LR: What happened was that regional companies had to present their things, to the children's subcommittee if it was children's programmes or something called Regional Proposals if it was a more general programme. We had to go along and propose these programmes for transmission, whereas with a major company, like when I was at Thames, they just took what we did. There was no question of anybody being allowed to see it in advance. If Thames wanted to put on *Ace of Wands*, we put on *Ace of Wands*, and the first that Southern saw of *Ace of Wands* was on air. There was no question of revealing it in advance. So we had to take all our programmes along to the subcommittee. I think Michael Grade was there as a representative of the regional companies which was a bit ridiculous because he was director of programmes over at LWT which had no interest in the weekday children's schedule. However, he was the one big figure for a Major Company there, because there had to be a Major Controller there, and for some reason the music had stopped when he was there so he had to do it. He said, after seeing the first episode of *Noah's Castle*, 'I can't imagine that anybody watching that episode would ever want to watch the next episode.' I fumed inwardly, not outwardly, at the time. The thing is we were always meant to be submitting a pilot, or there was a pretence that we were always submitting a pilot, but for drama it didn't always make sense to make a pilot. So you didn't make a pilot, you made a six-part series and you showed them the first episode. Nobody really supported *Noah's Castle*, we never really supported that much in the committee, so I said, 'I'll take it away and recut the first two episodes as a single episode and speed it up.' But on the train back down to Southampton, I started absolutely fuming. Jeremy Warrington was then my boss, director of programmes,

and I told Jeremy what had happened and I said, 'I'm not going to do it. I'm not going to recut it. I'm going to say to them, "You can turn it down if you like but if you do we're going to do a major press conference and explain exactly what's happened. We'll show it exactly as it is and you can stuff it."' I think, in effect, we did that. We didn't have to do it but we used that threat and they said, 'Oh, calm down, we'll take it,' or words to that effect. Is that right?

VB: I think you went back and-

LR: But I didn't recut it. I'd said at the previous meeting that I'd recut it. What did I say when we went back?

VB: I think you said that you felt really strongly about the programme as it stood and you were quite happy to defend it but you didn't see why they would reject it. Obviously, I'm just reading between the lines but there was a sort of feeling of 'Well, we quite like it now.' They seemed to have done a complete U-turn.

LR: In the words of the Prime Minister or Michael Winner, 'Calm down, dear'. I think they just thought if I felt so strongly about it, it wasn't worth having the row.

VB: Moving on to ATV and Central, how did you move over to them?

LR: Well, I'd got three children, all of them in private education, and I needed a job. So I didn't hang around when Southern lost the franchise: I certainly contacted both Granada and Central, as ATV then were, with CVs. I suspect if I'd had any pride, I would have waited and I think I might well have been offered a job by one of these companies. I have a feeling that the IBA said, 'We don't want Lewis Rudd to be out of a job: he's done quite good work,' but I've never known this for certain. Anyway, both Granada and ATV offered me the job of

head of children's programmes. Living in Winchester, I worked out that Birmingham and Nottingham were closer to Winchester than Manchester was. I was quite tempted to return to Granada. It was Mike Scott who was director of programmes, who I'd known when I was at Granada, and David Plowright was managing director, I think, by then. I knew a couple of people at ATV as well, so I did have a choice in the end of going to either of them, having applied to both and talked to both of them. I chose to go to Central but I would rather have stayed with Southern or TVS, but TVS had Anna Home who obviously out-trumped Lewis Rudd with the IBA, which wasn't a great compliment to me, I felt at that time. But there you go! She was the producer of *Grange Hill* but she hadn't been there [as an executive?]; I'd been an executive in children's programmes for however long, but there you go.

VB: When you did go to ATV, you were – I'm trying to think of an academic way saying 'going great guns' but you did so much while you were there. You set up the Junior TV Workshop.

LR: Yes, I'm very proud of that inspiration, I must say.

VB: And it seems to have expanded not just the social make-up of the children who appear in children's television but it seems to actually expand the appearance of children in children's television as a whole. Do you think that's fair?

LR: What, the workshop?

VB: Yes, there seem to be more children in children's television.

LR: Well, my rationale behind the workshop was that I didn't particularly like using kids from London stage schools because I thought a lot of them were geared more toward song and dance than realistic acting. The kids I did like using from London

were Anna Scher kids. The *Going Out* cast, for instance, came from Anna Scher, mainly, I think. My train of thought was ‘I wonder if I could get Anna Scher to move up to Nottingham,’ and then I thought, ‘No, that’s daft.’ Then I thought, with remarkable confidence, considering Anna Scher is quite an unusual, if not unique, person, I thought, ‘Well, better find our own Anna Scher.’ I was incredibly lucky because I enlisted a producer who I knew well through [Jonathan _____?], Peter Murphy, who I think I’d never actually worked with, because I knew he’d worked in Theatre in Education, working in television, to find me an Anna Scher. He produced a marvellous shortlist and he got Sue Nott, who’s now a senior drama executive at the BBC, and she was pretty well as good as Anna Scher! Which was amazing really. And then she found Ian Smith, and it’s invidious to make comparisons, but certainly it’s blossomed even more under him since he took over from Sue. Either there are an awful lot of talented people out there, which there probably are, or we were just very, very lucky, so it worked very well. But the other rationale was the idea was that it’s not very healthy for children to be away from home a lot and also it’s nicer for them to be near their home. Also, I had this altruistic thought that why should everybody only listen to London kids’ accents, why shouldn’t they listen to Nottingham and Birmingham kids’ accents?

VB: Absolutely.

LR: Birmingham was always more of a problem. I always make unwise remarks about Birmingham accents, but I won’t. The thing was that I always remember having to go up to Birmingham and every time a taxi driver talked to me, saying [imitates lugubrious Birmingham accent: ‘it’s not really very nice today’], I would think that they were making a joke because every Brummy sounds like a comedian. Anyway,

enough of my anti-Brummy talk, but some of the Brummy kids there did all right.

VB: Some of them have done remarkably well. I know also from an article in *The Stage* that you said when you were at ATV, you were also looking for children of more ethnic backgrounds because you said that the region was very ethnically diverse.

LR: Yes.

VB: Did you find that more children from ethnic backgrounds were coming into television acting?

LR: Well, we certainly made an effort. We started in Nottingham and didn't open Birmingham till later, and Birmingham got even better from an ethnic recruitment point of view. We certainly made an active effort to bring in ethnic kids and I think we did very well. The thing I think we did less well with was using disabled and special needs kids: I felt we should have made more effort in that direction, and also in devising characters who were disabled in some way, [wheelchair-bound characters played by wheelchair-bound actors]. I remember, at the start of TVS, one thing I was very critical about was the drama series they did about a girl in a wheelchair. What was the name of it? And she was played by an able-bodied child actress rather than a disabled actress, and I thought that was shocking. You shouldn't be doing that.

VB: Was that *Mandog*?

LR: No, it had a girl's name: Cassie Palmer, something like that.

VB: *The Haunting of Cassie Palmer*?

LR: Was it that? I think it was. I don't know: ask Anna, she'll know.

VB: I will do.

LR: But I expect I was partly delighted that they were doing something wrong, and partly genuinely censorious about it.

VB: It's a fairly natural reaction.

LR: I've reached the stage where I can be honest about these things.

VB: Well, I've taken up nearly an hour of your time now.

LR: Yes, I think we probably ought to come to a halt soon.

VB: I just wanted to ask you, just really, really quickly, about a couple of programmes: *Luna*, that you produced for Central. That had Patsy Kensit in it. That was fairly unusual in that it relied quite a lot not just on fantastic backgrounds but it had this constructed language in it.

LR: That was, of course, a total fantasy. I'm not quite sure why I'd done *Luna*: it certainly wasn't something I'd sought out. I think I was probably a bit besotted at working with Mickey Dolenz who produced and directed it. I did think the scripts were very funny. What was the name of the writer who also played the butler figure in it? Because I did think the scripts were funny.

VB: I can't actually remember off the top of my head.

LR: As I say, he played one of the main characters, the butler. It was a bit like *Red Dwarf*, wasn't it? It had that feel about it. I don't look on it as something that was my work. I think I definitely made the decision to go ahead with it but I think it was probably in the ATV pipeline when I joined.

VB: You mentioned co-productions earlier and one of the big co-productions in the 1980s was *The Worst Witch* with HBO, a really early HBO, and I was just wondering how involved you were with that?

LR: That was the one-off musical version of *The Worst Witch*, of course. Later, HTV did several successful series of *The Worst Witch* and I would rather have done that than the musical version. That was brought to me by Colin Shindler who was the producer on it. It wasn't an enjoyable experience. I thought *The Worst Witch* was a marvellous property. I think it would have been much better to go straight to a series rather than have got involved in this elaborate musical with all the horrors of a co-production: an unknown American star from American sitcoms which had never been seen in the UK, and also an American soap that never been seen over here, playing the headmistress [Charlotte Rae, *The Facts of Life*]. I don't look back on it with particular affection. It was a headache to do and, as I say, I think we managed to upset Jill Murphy sufficiently not to have a good enough relationship to go ahead and do a series with her afterwards, which would have been the best outcome from it.

VB: That's a shame.

LR: Because I do think it was *Harry Potter* before *Harry Potter*, *The Worst Witch*. The books are terrific.

VB: Yes, absolutely, and very similar in structure: the boarding school, the magic-

LR: Absolutely, and I've always liked that boarding school thing and it's something we never managed to do. We did *Phoenix Hall* at Central which was meant to combine the fun in the dorm of the traditional fee-paying boarding school with being able to have ordinary working-class kids in it because it was a state boarding school. It was based on the fact that there were a few state boarding schools around but we just didn't get the right writers. It never came together.

VB: One of the things that did come together though was *The Secret World of Polly Flint*, which I've seen and I love.

LR: That's the first thing that I did when I got the job at Central was to write to Helen Cresswell and say, 'Can you write something specially for us?' She'd done a lot for the BBC, and she had a foot in television as well as a foot in writing novels. I was very pleased that she agreed. The thing I'm rather proud of was that I'd bought a little book, I've still got it on my shelves, about Nottingham legends and I came up with this one about the buried village and said, 'What about this?' She used that and in the book she even made out a dedication to me for having found Grimstone, so it was very nice the way it came together, but we did have to get a co-production for it because it was all film. We didn't have the budget to do it unless we got a co-production but it took me a long time: the serial and the book were meant to come out simultaneously. In fact, the book got published a year or two before we were able to do it.

VB: Yes, but that does seem to be an increasing trend in the 1980s, doesn't it, this need for co-productions to actually make programmes?

LR: Yes, we put money into this fairly- Well, it was all right: it was this thing called *Golden Pennies* which was about the Australian gold rush.

VB: With Jason Donovan in it?

LR: It got me a trip to Australia but there were a lot of rather awkward sessions on the script with the writer. The thing in Australia is if you're writing in the Australia in the 19th century, anyone who's Scottish or Irish in origin is all right; anyone who's English is a villain. And so it was with these scripts and I was trying to make him realise that we were putting money into it, although we were getting money from them as well. I'll never understand the details of the deal. I know it was a very good deal for us, no real credit to me: I know we got a programme

that cost us very little and that got us back a lot of money from the network so it was quite a good deal.

VB: Last two, I promise. *Palace Hill*, which developed out of *Your Mother Wouldn't Like It*. I was watching an episode of it on YouTube and it seems almost like live-action *Spitting Image*.

LR: I know, because people thought that it was going to be puppets. I remember getting letters complaining about it in advance and the fact that we were doing puppets of the Royal Family, which we never were but people aligned it with that. Of course, the main characters were Princes William and Harry but when we did they were two and nought or three and one, so it was doing them as older kids at school. Of course, we weren't actually parodying them at the age they were, we were parodying them at the age they were going to be in ten years' time, and I think people didn't quite understand that. Certainly, if you look at it now, of course, you don't realise that they were babies then, William and Harry. One of them was played as Prince Charles, wasn't he? The actor playing it did all the Prince Charles mannerisms.

VB: Well, there's also a particularly trenchant caricature of Margaret Thatcher in it.

LR: Yes, it was quite satirical. That's right, yes; I haven't seen these things for a long time. We'd started doing it a bit of it in *Your Mother Wouldn't Like It*, which was an interesting programme because it was originally meant to be far more factual. It was originally meant to be more like *Wise Up*. *Wise Up* was a programme we did for Channel Four which was very successful in terms of international awards, and it was an issue-based, factual programme for teenagers. *Your Mother Wouldn't Like It* started off by trying to do a similar programme that came entirely out of the workshop and the pilot for it had quite a lot of factual material in it, but the only thing anybody really liked

in it was the comedy, so it turned into a comedy show. It really was devised by and with the kids from the workshop but, as I say, it turned into a show mainly parodying other television programmes.

VB: I think it works brilliantly. I was actually laughing out loud.

LR: It did work, but it wasn't what we thought we were doing at first. As I say, as we put it together, we realised that none of the factual stuff really worked but the comedy did.

VB: *Wail of the Banshee*: I haven't been able to find any information on this, could you tell me anything?

LR: No, Sue Nott. Have you got a contact for Sue Nott?

VB: I haven't, no.

LR: Well, she's at the BBC so she's easy to find. She's sort of head of children's independent drama commissioning; that's her field anyway. She's the executive producer of all children's drama made by independents and she's at the BBC, based in Salford.

VB: Okay, I'll try and get in touch with her then.

LR: Yes, I would ask Sue about that because it was very much Sue's baby. Sue had gone from being the first leader of the workshop to being a producer in our department, and I said, 'Okay, you can do *Wail of the Banshee*.' I think I managed to then blot it out of my memory. It wasn't that bad but I was never that keen on it, and I think I was trusting her with it. As I say, you can't remember everything; you tend to remember the things you've done that you liked best.

VB: No, absolutely. What was the thing that you liked best that you've produced over the years?

LR: Possibly *Worzel Gummidge* but I don't know that I'd necessarily say that. I was quite proud of *Woof!* because it's partly about your role in its production. You see, *Woof!* I was quite pleased with because I discovered it: I got hold of the book and decided to do it based on that. It's quite difficult, isn't it? I should require notice of this question. At the time, you get a terrific buzz from nearly every programme, but *Do Not Adjust Your Set* is the one that's always on my CV. As I say in this piece I'm going to send you, it was all this guy Humphrey Barclay and my only idea was getting Humphrey Barclay from the BBC Radio to come and join us, but he then discovered these people who turned out to be two thirds of *Monty Python* plus Sir David Jason, who were not bad unknowns to find. But that was all Humphrey: although it has an honourable place in my CV, I can't take any credit. With *Worzel Gummidge*, although it came to me ready-made, I did have a bit more part in that. *Woof!* really did start with me, so I'm more proud of that but *Noah's Castle* was my idea to do. I liked some of the other ones I did at Southern, like *Midnight is a Place*, a Joan Aiken book which I was quite proud of having adapted. I already mentioned *Wise Up*, which again was something that was developed from the germ of an idea of mine. It was originally going to be a sort of consumer programme for kids and eventually became an issue programme for slightly older children, but that was one which I worked through with a producer, Nick Robertson, and we developed that. Again, a lot of the work for *Wise Up* was done with the workshop, although the workshop didn't figure largely in it once it became a programme but it had a lot of its values. I was always very pleased when the workshop were involved other than actors, because their input could be very useful.

VB: Of course. Final question: what do you think are the most important values in producing children's television?

LR: Oh God. Final question, eh?

VB: Save the hardest for last!

LR: I don't know; I can think of a few abstract nouns, like integrity, commitment, blahblah, but I really am too cynical to go for that sort of stuff. I think, in a funny sort of way, things have probably come full circle. I think in the heyday of children's programmes a lot of those programmes were very indulgent to the producers and the writers and the talent making them. I think the best of them certainly found a resonance with some kids but probably a lot of the ones we *thought* were the best of them didn't appeal to a very large number of children. Some of the more crass type of programmes probably had broader appeal. It's very good for television to do things that give a wonderful experience to a minority but we shouldn't necessarily fool ourselves that it's sufficient to do that, and you ought to be doing things that appeal to a wider audience. As I was writing about *Do Not Adjust Your Set*, I was thinking, 'Actually, it was the awards and the reviews in the papers that were really good about *Do Not Adjust Your Set* and not, as far as I can remember, the ratings.' That's a good thing, that we weren't just ratings-driven, but on the other hand, it's a bad thing if we were making programmes that were more appreciated by interested adults than by the target audience. That one shouldn't lose sight of the audience while people are patting you on the back, I think, was one of the lessons to learn. I wouldn't want television to become, as it may be becoming and this is not just true of children's programmes, something that doesn't try to bring new things to the audience or - I hate to use the word but - try to educate the audience's palate to something a little more unusual or different. I'd rather have children watching *Noah's Castle* than *Freewheelers* but *Freewheelers* may have been more popular with children than *Noah's Castle*.

VB: Well, I don't know entirely but I can tell you about impact on the audience of children, because I think I told you yesterday that my sister and all her friends remember *Bernard's Watch* as the defining programme of their childhood.

LR: *Bernard's Watch* was a light-hearted, popular programme with an intriguing fantasy idea. Originally, the first *Bernard's Watch* was written for the EBU Drama Exchange. We were asking writers to come up with something that wasn't dependent on speech so we needed something very visual. I remember Andrew Norriss saying, and he wouldn't thank me for quoting him, 'This is a bit of an old idea, I think, but what about this?' The actual writer didn't think that *Bernard's Watch* was the most original idea!

VB: Well, it's lingered with them. My sister's now twenty-seven and cabin crew for a major airline and anytime anyone asks her about her favourite children's television programme, she says, 'Ooh, *Bernard's Watch*!'

LR: Well, it's very gratifying and one has this with a lot of things: *Ace of Wands* had an enormous impact as did *The Tomorrow People*, which we touched on. I commissioned *The Tomorrow People* before I left Thames but then left my successor, Sue Turner, to sort out all its myriad problems and she always used to make a point of reminding me about that. I know that they had a considerable following both at the time and since then, and that's great. I think *Worzel Gummidge* probably appealed to more adults than children though. No, I suppose children quite enjoyed it but it was old-fashioned even at the time we did it. It wasn't really a modern idea. It felt like a bit like a classic children's programme from the fifties even in the late seventies, I think.

VB: Absolutely. Well, I've taken up far more of your time than I intended. Thank you so much for your time and agreeing to talk to me.

**Interview with Sue Nott, London, Friday 16th August
2013**

VB: The first thing I wanted to start off with really was to ask how you got started. I think you said you started working in children's television in the 1980s?

SN: That's right, yes. The common denominator of my slightly weird and wonderful career is children, so I haven't always worked in children's television but I have virtually always worked with children. I started life a long time ago as a teacher of English and Drama, having like you done an English degree and taught English and Drama for three years at the end of which I was in charge of Drama. My husband was at the time an actor at Nottingham Playhouse and we set up our own theatre company, a community theatre company, Theatre in Education. So we did drama, many touring theatre workshops, and because I was doing that kind of work in theatre, I happened to be in the right place at the right time when Central Television turned up in Nottingham at the beginning of the 80s and Lewis Rudd found me. They were looking for somebody to set up what was then called the Junior Central Television Workshop to act as a casting pool mainly and that was really my first contact with television and I ran this effectively youth theatre under the auspices of Central Television. I quickly discovered that not only was it a very useful resource for casting but it was also a useful resource for exploring ideas through discussion, through improvisation, and that was actually how *Your Mother Wouldn't Like It* came about. So that was the first thing I got involved in, initially as workshop leader and then as associate producer or assistant producer. When Peter Murphy who was the original producer of *Your Mother Wouldn't Like It* moved on to HTV I took over as producer on that but it kind of came through the workshop. So when I started producing children's television,

most of what I did, simply because that was the way I was used to working, was to involve children in the whole process, from concept through to casting. We would bring in writers who liked that working that way and were prepared to work with children's improvisations and so on. That was certainly how *Your Mother Wouldn't Like It* started.

VB: So would it be fair to say that you adapted the theatrical processes that you'd previously used to television, or was the Children's Television Workshop something that was constructing its own processes as it went along?

SN: A bit of both, really. I think yes, there were theatrical practices but also the practices and processes involved in drama teaching in schools. It was a bit of both of those, and then the Television Workshop did actually create its own process as it went along as well. I think it was the first time to my knowledge any way that a drama group or youth theatre like that had been specifically run by a television company so it was like a youth theatre but with a specific focus on television and film-making. So children were learning more about the process of working in the television environment, which was slightly different.

VB: Lewis did say that it was modelled in some way on the Anna Scher theatre.

SN: That was certainly his inspiration when he set it up, but I think the main similarity was that it wasn't a stage school in the same way that Anna Scher's wasn't a stage school. It was meant to be for normal kids whatever that might mean: kids who went to normal schools. They weren't actually in a stage school; they were coming to a drama club or youth theatre after school and at weekends, and in the same way that Anna Scher although not exclusively was best known for Cockney kids, London kids,

who would give an authentic feel to dramas like Grange Hill, and that was the model that Lewis had in mind when he decided to set up Central Junior Television Workshop. This was partly because Central was obviously setting up in Nottingham and Birmingham and Lewis for a bunch of reasons I'm sure but also for editorial [?] reasons didn't want to import London kids from the London stage schools but wanted an authentic Midlands feel to the dramas that he was commissioning. So that was the inspiration. Whether our actual process of working was exactly the same as Anna, I'm not sure. I did my own thing in my own way but yes, that was the inspiration.

VB: So what year did that start? Do you remember?

SN: 1983. And the first session was on February 21st 1983: we've just had our thirtieth birthday, which has been quite an exciting time! So it's still going strong.

VB: Really? Fantastic! And you're still involved with it?

SN: Yes; funnily enough, I'm now on their board.

VB: Really? That's amazing. Congratulations on your thirtieth birthday. So I think I'm right in saying that Peter Murphy goes to HTV in about 1988, 89.

SN: No, a bit before that: 1987. I think I produced series three of your Mother Wouldn't like it but it was called YMWLI: Palace Hill so it was the cross-over series and that was 1987.

VB: Right, and Your Mother Wouldn't Like It was a sketch show as I understand it but Palace Hill was more of a sitcom.

SN: Palace Hill came out YMWLI. YMWLI, quite right, is as you say a sketch show. One of the sketch shows that stripped

across the series was a kind of mini sitcom which was Palace Hill which was about two Princes, Harry and William, who go to a comprehensive school. How funny, that dates it doesn't it? That started off as a sort of five minute sitcom which was stripped across YMWLI and then we decided after three series of YMWLI, I think, to take Palace Hill out and give it its own series, so that would have been 1988.

VB: Just going back to the operations of the Central Junior Television Workshop, I find that fascinating, especially since it seems to have such a huge impact on how children's television is made and how children themselves are represented on screen. Even more so than previous years of Children's ITV, it forces this expansion of how children are seen and what accents are heard, etc.

SN: Completely.

VB: So in those early days what kind of response were you getting? Do you remember? Were there quite a lot of children coming after school to join in this workshop?

SN: Yes, definitely. It was interesting because remember, I'd been working in youth theatre in Nottingham for some years and when you're doing a youth theatre or drama club you tended to get the same kind of kids coming in. They tended to be quite middle class, quite white, and it was extremely interesting actually that when we set up the television workshop (and remember of course Central was new to Nottingham as well so that was all very new and very exciting!) but I think this was a very new thing. A drama club attached to and run by a television company was something that was incredibly new and incredibly exciting and we did have a lot of applications and without having to try too hard a much wider social conception

than you would normally expect to come to a youth theatre or drama club, although that was definitely part of the brief and I did do a certain amount of going to the kind of places that you wouldn't normally expect theatre for kids.

VB: Well, I was going to ask about that because I actually discovered a newspaper report in which Lewis said to the newspapers, 'We are looking for children from ethnic backgrounds. Central has a viewership that has a huge amount of ethnic diversity so that's what we're looking for.' So were people responding to that or were you having to go out and look for non-Caucasian child actors?

SN: Bit of both, bit of both. I mean, mainly we were targeting schools and I was contacting drama teachers and secondary schools initially. The primary schools thing came later, but [I was contacting] schools where I knew there were drama teachers. Remember I'd been there for a while so I knew lots of people in that area, where I knew they had strong drama departments and had good kids and would be supportive but I also went to - and this is where my community theatre background came in useful - I was able to go to community groups I knew in the parts of Nottingham that would attract an ethnic majority, deliberately looking for kids who may not have thought that they would be interested in doing drama and got a really interesting range, some of whom dropped by the wayside. But that was a deliberate taking of risks.

VB: Because they are children and they do lose interest.

SN: Yes, and it was interesting: Lewis may have said this to you but when we first started we didn't know whether producers and directors who were looking for kids would take to these kids or whether they would still want kids from the stage

schools, kids with perhaps more experience. Lewis was quite anxious and very keen to be seen not to be forcing the workshop on anybody, and so we bent backwards in the early days to say to the kids who came to the workshop, 'You may never be on television. If you think you're coming to this just so that you can be on telly, think again. This is going to take time, it's going to take commitment, you've got to want to do this for its own sake because you might never- It's quite possible that none of you will ever be on television.' I remember Lewis saying to me if no one ever gets cast, that's not a sign of failure, you mustn't worry about that.

VB: That's fantastic, because it gives you that room, not to fail but to certainly take risks and experiment.

SN: It was very exciting and very quickly producers and directors did see the value, and you're absolutely right you know about the sea change [in CTV] at around that time. I'm sure the workshop was instrumental in that but it would have been part of a whole process of which it was only one part I suppose but before that time you tended to have older actors playing down. It was less usual to have really young kids on television at all, I think, whereas now it would be almost unthinkable to have a children's television drama without kids in the cast, but I mean it varies enormously. Recently, the BBC did *Leonardo*, which was shot in South Africa and did have a sort of young adult cast: early twenties. But that was very unusual and felt a bit strange, actually. At the other extreme, we've got the *Sparticle Mystery* which has no adults in it at all, which is more like the days of *YMWLI* where there wasn't a single adult at all.

VB: You might not be able to answer this for me but how do Equity restrictions feature in this? I know that there are certain

restrictions on child performers and there have been for the best part of a century. I was just wondering whether there have been any changes in the Equity thing or whether it was just something that the Workshop worked around?

SN: Yes, these days, of course, Equity is not a closed shop anyway, so Equity doesn't really come into it. There are lots of rules and regulations about licencing children and how many hours they can work but that's a governmental thing rather than an Equity thing. In the early days, of course, Equity was still a closed shop and for children under 16 it wasn't an issue. The gentleman's agreement was that they got paid half the Equity minimum in terms of fees; over-sixteens- Now what happened? I think they did get their Equity card if they were- how the hell did it work? I know what happened! If they had had work under-16, then they could work over-16 and then they got their Equity card. I do remember that now because there was this mad dash to get people work when they were 15 so that we could then use them when they were 16. Actually, I'm not sure if you should quote me on that as I may have got it slightly wrong. It's a long time ago but I think that's how it worked.

VB: I can edit this slightly when it comes to transcribing! But I have had a look around the Equity regulations and I know of course about the governmental regulations as well but it's difficult to [understand]. Well, maybe I just don't have the sort of mind that can sort out clauses and whatnot.

SN: Yes, it's funny because all that seems like such a long time ago now because Equity doesn't really feature in the [indistinguishable?] anymore, so I'd forgotten all that. But no, under 16, it wasn't an issue, children could work. Over 16, it became more of an issue but I think that was the case, that if they'd worked under 16, that was considered experience.

VB: But was there also government regulation that anyone under twelve couldn't work?

SN: No, you can work from the age of five but there are quite strict licensing regulations, and are still, about the number of hours they can work so the younger they are, the fewer hours they can work and the fewer days they can work. I think over 13 you can work 80 days in a year, under 13 only 40, under 5 I think it's less again, but my son was in Crossroads when he was five so it wasn't impossible.

VB: Really? Fantastic. So you're a fully theatrical and televisual family, then?

SN: No, still I have two sons and they're both in the business now. My older son's a theatrical director and my younger son's a script editor on Holby, so-

VB: Really? That's brilliant.

SN: I had hoped that one of them would do something sensible but unfortunately not.

VB: Sensible is boring!

SN: I think it's in the blood.

VB: So going back to children's television workshop, you were going out, you said, to drama groups and schools and everything, were you operating on an audition system? Was it fairly selective?

SN: Yes, there was and still is an audition process but anyone

could audition and you don't have to pay tuition or anything like that so anyone could come along to audition and we saw absolutely everyone who applied which sometimes meant 500 at a time. I used to run workshops all week and see people in groups of thirty like a drama class, really, and then select on that basis, but there were auditions. What we were doing was sifting to save producers and directors the trouble of having to go to every school in Nottingham to try and find the odd kid who might be good and committed. It was an initial sifting process, if you like, and then a training process beyond that.

VB: How long do you think it took before Central started regarding it not so much as a casting pool but a legitimate crucible of children's TV in and of itself?

SN: Interesting question. Fairly quickly, actually. Casting happened very quickly, slightly to our surprise. Lewis may have told you about the Dramaramas that we did.

VB: He didn't, not in any real detail.

SN: Possibly because they weren't fantasy. They were more realistic, but some of them were fantasy, actually: Josephine Jo, Night of the Narrow Boats. They were kind of one-off dramas and those started casting from the workshop almost immediately when we started which was [indistinguishable?] In terms of working with the workshop on scripts and ideas, again it started quite early with your Mother Wouldn't Like it and that was really down to Peter Murphy who had a very similar background to mine. He'd worked in Theatre in Education and community theatre, and understood, with me, what potential was. He was the first producer of YMWLI. He was actually the person who Lewis appointed to set up the workshop in the first place and it was he who found me and oversaw what I was

doing when we first setting up. So Peter was very instrumental in all that and was used to that way of working as well so YMWLI was the first thing that got that going.

VB: And how instrumental were the children themselves in developing it? Was it through discussion or was there a writer in charge?

SN: I mean, the hype would have people think that it was for children, by children but it wasn't written by the children. It was written by professional writers, of whom my husband was one, but the process tended to be that I would run a workshop session. We would be looking for characters, we would improvise around the kind of characters that we were looking for. YMWLI particularly was a sketch show which was largely based on spoofing existing shows so one of the things we were doing was getting reference points right from the children's point of view. It was what shows they were watching, what shows they would identify with, what shows they would recognize so that and the characters who were leading the whole show, if you like. What we would do is the writers would come along to the workshops and they would observe, they would make notes, and then they would take that material away; they wouldn't transcribe it in the sense that the children were actually writing it, but they would use those improvisations as inspiration and as research and base what they were doing on the kids' work. Certainly, YMWLI was cast 100% from the workshop: we didn't audition outside the workshop.

VB: Well, I think that's really interesting because it kind of fits in with something that I'd already thought about 1980s children's television in particular which is that a lot of it is predicated upon this idea that children have media literacy which is something that doesn't really crop up so much in the

previous decades and of course YMWLI and Palace Hill are playing off that quite heavily as are other children's programmes, like Supergran or stuff like that which used television as touchstones.

SN: Yes, and the big change as you rightly pointed out was that change from family to children's.

VB: Yes.

SN: So it was at that point that people started targeting that 6-12 year old age group as opposed to shows that were for the whole family, although I suppose the BBC – I wasn't there at that time – but I suppose the BBC Sunday afternoon classics were the crossover point, things that Anna and you I'm sure must have talked about like Five Children and It and those kind of things, where we're still slightly more in the family territory and the classics. And I don't know who'd do those anymore? It's interesting because we find it very difficult.

VB: I was talking to Anna and she said that while Children's got the Sunday slot back for Chronicles of Narnia in the late 1980s these days it's more that the Children's Department can bid for it alongside the Drama department so it could be any-

SN: But the interesting thing now is that because BBC Children's basically has its own channel, CBeebies and CBBC, which are very specifically targeted at a specific age group, when we have done those Sunday afternoon things, it's quite difficult for us because they're very difficult to schedule on the channel. If they're on BBC1, then BBC 1 get all the credit and we paid for it. So of late commissioners have been more reluctant to do that and said, oh, leave it to BBC Drama, adult drama, but then they don't necessarily want to do stuff that's

too child-focused. So I worry a bit about what's going to happen to all those BBC classics.

VB: Which are still tremendously profitable, I would imagine, because it tends to be that British media feel, I suppose, that glossy production. Anyway-

SN: Anyway, this whole crossover point and, as you say, that move to having more younger children actually in dramas is all part of that whole process of focusing on the children's audience specifically as opposed to adults. Certainly, there have been times, less so now, but there was certainly a time, say in the late 90s, early 200s, when BBC Children's was a no adult zone and we'd absolutely avoid things that we thought adults might enjoy so that the children's audience perceived it as a club specifically for them which was a bit naughty, a bit edgy. I'd even go in fact further back: I mean, I suppose interestingly the very choice of the title YMWLI was a nod towards saying, This is for you, kids, never mind your parents, there's enough for them, this is very much for you.

VB: Yes, and it also comes out around the same time as Children's ITV becomes Children's ITV. It becomes a very branded channel, I suppose, so it ties it with this [idea of kids and subversion].

SN: Yes, in those wonderful days when ITV was divided into lots of different companies, all of whom had a children's department, even Tyne Tees, HTV and companies like that.

VB: Yes, halcyon days. I know that you're not working for ITV anymore, you're working for the BBC but was there a sense that-

SN: I've also done things for Channel 4, incidentally.

VB: Sorry?

SN: I've also done things for Channel 4. For a while, Channel 4 were commissioning children's programmes.

VB: Yes, I saw a couple of things on your filmography.

SN: Coping with... was the one I did specifically for Channel 4, which should be there because it won a few BAFTAs.

VB: Do you know, I don't think it's on this one. And this is your IMDB.

SN: That's a bit worrying, isn't it? We did Coping With... Grown-Ups, Coping With... Christmas, and then a series of Coping Withs... for Channel 4.

VB: I cannot see it, maybe I'm just missing something.

SN: It was the early 90s.

VB: I also have the BFI copy. Oh! Coping With... Christmas, you're definitely on the BFI one. Coping With... Christmas, Coping With... Grown-Ups.

SN: You see, there's a huge gap there.

VB: Coping With... Relatives, Coping With... Cool: something I've always had an issue with.

SN: That's really funny because it doesn't go very far back. It's quite interesting: it's got YMWLI, Palace Hill, Wail of the

Banshee, and then there's this huge gap for my entire freelance career and then Don't Let Go was when I was Head of Education, as Executive Producer. There's a whole swathe of stuff that isn't there from my freelance producing days.

VB: I don't know where they get the information from; I don't know whether it's crowd sourced.

SN: I don't know. They've never asked me.

VB: Very odd.

SN: That is a very peculiar thing.

VB: That must be very odd, going, 'Oh, yeah!' Yourself in list form.

SN: I know, I know, but these are the days when anyone can find out anything about people, aren't they? I never check what's out there; you've got to have some lines. Coping With... was again very much workshop based. It was for Channel 4 between 1994 and 1997, so that's in my freelance producing days. Again, it was a mock documentary-drama where kids talked about what it was like to be them but it was kind of a comedy-drama, basically, and totally and exclusively cast from the workshop [and with no one else?]

VB: So that was a Channel 4 production cast from the Central Workshop.

SN: It was a Channel 4 commission and it was actually by this time Carlton rather than Central, but at that time I was freelance.

VB: Okay, grand. Well, hopefully, we'll come back to that in a little minute. Just going back to the idea of Palace Hill. Palace Hill developed as you said out of YMWLI, and again it's very media-savvy, it's very aware of pop-culture references. It seems almost to be a live-action Spitting Image.

SN: Yes, that's the other thing that you see virtually nothing of [these days]. I can't think of anything like it at the moment, which is vaguely satirical. In Palace Hill, you've got Princes William and Harry at a comprehensive school; that's quite bold in the first instance. The head girl is a young Margaret Thatcher. I don't think anyone would do that now. All credit to Lewis for having the courage to do it, and there were times he worried about it, I know. He got quite a lot of flak, particularly about the Princes, because they were babies at the time and people said, 'You know, this isn't fair because you're making fun of people who aren't old enough to talk back or anything.' But it was very affectionate and it wasn't based on anything real. The Spitting Image is an interesting one because yes, obviously it's not puppets but there is a satirical edge to it in a very soft, light way for kids that we simply don't do anymore. And I suspect we wouldn't: I think we'd be too frightened of what the Daily Mail would say.

VB: It's a shame, because I've only seen one episode of it because there are programmes that are very hard to hold of

SN: I expect it's very difficult to get hold of. I think there are certain things on YouTube; it's become a bit of a cult thing, partly because the cast had members of my original television workshop half of whom are now in the business. There was Gillian Kemp, who's now a very well-reputed director, there's Steve Ryde who's one of the main producers at CBBC. Lots of people who were in the workshop at that time are now in the

business and it's become a bit cult, I think, to kind of [look for the early stuff?]

VB: Well, the one episode I saw was actually really, really interesting to me, not just because it's framed as satirical which is fantastic in and of itself, but there was also this framing device of an alien princess who had crashed to Earth.

SN: Yes, I remember that one, yes.

VB: Was that just the one episode or was it something longer?

SN: That would be for that series, yes. It'd be better if you could talk to my husband actually because he was very involved in creating that and he was one of two writers on Palace Hill. That was just wild, off the wall imagination really.

VB: What I thought was really, really interesting was that there's never any attempt to make it look real. You had a cardboard cutout of a rocket very obviously held on a pencil as it launched itself across the sky. I think it's because Palace Hill was so rooted in pop culture that children were possibly willing to go, 'Ahaha, these are what we expect from Dr Who; we expect the shaky sets and the do it yourself aesthetic.'

SN: And now we expect film standard effects, don't we? Funnily enough, one of the series [I'm involved with] is MI High for the BBC which is now in its seventh series and I've recently had to, for compliance reasons- While we repeat them, we have to recompile them and I was recompiling the one series I wasn't involved with because it was before I started this job which was series one. Even between series one and series 7 which is about 6 years, the difference in production values is quite phenomenal! And that's just in 6 years. So it is quite

interesting, you're right, that kind of rough and ready cardboard cutout deal.

VB: But I think it helped - sorry, I'm just sticking my oar in here - but I think it helped that it was framed as comedy so they could actually get away with that and of course it was so framed by media literacy that it was something that could be understood in terms of the narrative.

SN: But children are very media-savvy, you're right, much more so than adults and always have been. I never cease to be amazed at how good kids are, and I'm not talking about A star, academic kids because sometimes they're not the best, but kids are very good at picking up context [clues?] and subtle differences and subtexts which you think, Bloody hell, how did you pick that up? But interestingly, just talking about the production values as well, and you alluded to this right at the beginning of our conversation actually was that move from the use of studio to [OB] - And of course production processes have changed completely. There have always been films, a film background to drama, and Lewis may have talked about that because *Woof!* was produced and directed by people like David Cobham who had a film background so they were much more location based. Certainly *YMWLI*, *Palace Hill*, these were all studio based and *Wail of the Banshee* as well. *Wail of the Banshee* was at an interesting time, I think that would be 1991, and that was quite a transitional phase where we were moving away again from studio drama to single camera, location based drama, more filmic if you like. I think *Wail of the Banshee* in some ways suffered for it. It was too ambitious for the budget, to be absolutely honest.

VB: Just to clarify: all I really know about it is that there's some sort of ecological background and it's a fantasy drama. Is that

accurate?

SN: Roughly, right. it was a fantasy drama about- Gosh, I'm going to have to put you in touch with my husband. He wrote the damn thing.

VB: Anything you can remember?

SN: It was such a long time ago! Over twenty years now. It was a really complex plot. There was a sort of ecological background to it but that was only a very small part of it really. It was the baddies were the Banshees who upsetting the world ecology, I suppose, for their own ends and then it involved Merlin and King Arthur but Merlin had retired from magic and was trying to- He was like an addict who was trying to get off magic and get clean but was dragged back into because we needed Merlin to help sort out the problems.

VB: Just when I thought I was out, they dragged me back in.

SN: Exactly. And King Arthur was a samurai. I can't remember for the life of me why King Arthur was a samurai but David Yip plays him.

VB: That's interesting! That's very different from every other Arthurian based children's television programme!

SN: And there was a strange creature but Merlin's thing [narrative] was in a cave and we did use the caves in Nottingham as a location but most of it was built in the studio in the days before lighting and design was that good. One of the criticisms leveled, I think, was that it did look a bit polystyrene. But we also shot stuff at Center Parcs. It was so bizarre. I'll have to look at it again and find some stuff for you.

VB: Why Center Parcs? Was it germane to the plot? Did it appear in the script?

SN: It was in Nottingham! Oh God, yes, it was all written round it [CP]. There was an adventure where everyone was chasing everyone else down the flumes: it was a complete bloody nightmare!

VB: Yes, it must have been a nightmare to film.

SN: It was very ambitious. My husband wrote it. I think, if I'm absolutely honest, the ambition was quite filmic and the resources were children's television and at the end of the day I think it suffered slightly from that. At the end of the day, the production values didn't and couldn't quite live up to the [indistinguishable: actual?] expectations but then it was also quite risky in the sense that there was one episode where we had Death, played by Alan Corduner, like a court jester. It was very funny but the undercurrents were quite dark, and it was at a time when the ITV Network Committee had decided, for some reason I never understood, to try to put all their children's drama out earlier in the afternoon, at 3.30, 4.00pm. Lewis, quite understandably, got quite anxious about the [melodramatic, darker?] type of stuff. This was the time of the ITV Network Committee where they decided amongst themselves what the schedule was going to be and when things were going to go out, and they all got very nervous about it [Wail]. I was furious at the time, as producer, but they buried it on a Monday at about 3.30pm, 4 o'clock and because it went out in April to May and it was a 7-episode serial, it got clobbered by three bank holidays: the Easter bank holiday, the first May bank holiday and the last May bank holiday. So with the best will in the world, it was just impossible for the audience to follow the plot.

It wasn't completely unsuccessful but it died a bit of a death and never got re-commissioned, so that's why it's become kind of a cult classic.

VB: Well, if I can find it, I'll certainly give it a look.

SN: It's probably terrible: I'll see if I can find a copy. I don't know whether I've still some. Funnily enough, we're actually clearing out our storage unit and that had a lot of old VHS but we'd have to get in onto DVD for you to be able to view.

VB: That would be amazing if you could.

SN: I probably have got it somewhere because my husband and I were involved in it; we've tended to keep things that we were both involved in. We were just about to throw everything out!

VB: If there's anything you want to get rid of that you think I could use, I will gratefully receive it!

SN: Well, it'll all be on VHS. Have you got access to a VCR?

VB: Yes, I can do that. Obviously, I don't want to push you into anything but if you're getting rid of stuff-

SN: Well, I might use you! I might give you all my stuff on the condition that I can have a DVD copy.

VB: Not a problem: I can do that. Anyway, I wouldn't worry about me judging the quality because I have seen some- There's a Scottish Television production from the early 1970s called Cavern Deep about the Loch Ness Monster, that has to be seen to be believed, to be honest.

SN: Well, this is only 90s, so it shouldn't be quite that bad but

I'm almost too nervous to watch it now.

VB: I'm sure it's a lot better than you think it is. Anyway, just to return to the idea of spaces of television, you said that the production was almost restricted in some respects by the fact that it was in the studio, and that was due to the budget presumably?

SN: Partly budget, partly just processes: the way things were done. Everything's changed since; editing processes have changed. I sometimes laugh now because everything's digital, it means you can play with things forever and change things. When I first started producing, you went into the edit suite and there was no such thing as offline, you went into the online edit suite and the director would start the process. Then he'd ring me an hour or two in and say, Okay, it looks as if this is going to be over-running by five minutes so you need to cut five minutes but we're five minutes in already. So you couldn't cut anything in the first five minutes because every time you went back and changed something, you went down a generation in quality. So it meant that the whole process of production was completely different: you had to make decisions earlier and you had to be very clear about what you were doing. Now you can play with [productions] until the cows come home which is a good and a bad thing.

VB: So it's a more flexible in terms of the end product, I suppose, whereas previously it was perhaps a little more structured.

SN: Yes, possibly.

VB: In terms of the location shooting you did do, was the possibility of that agreed beforehand?

SN: Oh, definitely. What you'd do in one of those classical studio-based dramas would be that you'd do two-thirds studio and a third location, and in each episode you would have the majority in the studio but you would have certain location bits. Certainly, *Wail of the Banshee* would be a case in point, where there was quite a lot of location actually, maybe half and half. I can't remember the proportion now. But yes, that would all be agreed upfront, probably during the scripting process, actually.

VB: Actually, that was something that I wanted to address. In terms of the generation of the production, was there a budget that you went in with? Did you decide on the shooting style and spaces, according to that?

SN: Yes, you would have a budget and you would need to work within that.

VB: Going back to the Central TV Workshop, I don't really know much about the other programmes that were produced apart from the fantasy ones. I was just wondering whether you could remember any of the other programmes that came out of that?

SN: In terms of programmes that came out of that whole process of work, they tended to be the ones I did, to be honest, because that was the way I was used to working and the way I liked to work: *Your Mother Wouldn't Like It*, *Palace Hill*, less so *Wail of the Banshee* actually. That was more authored although we did improvise round the characters a bit, *Coping With...* which is the one I did for Channel 4. That very much came out of working with the workshop. We did two one-offs, and then a series, and the first one was *Coping With... Grown Ups*, and the writer was Peter Corey. We did a lot of work with

the workshop group, just talking about the problems of talking about the problems of coping with grown ups and getting a lot of stories from them, and a lot of authenticity from them. The one in the series that [was fairly early?] was *Coping With Relatives* and again a lot of the ideas came from the workshop. Then it was cut [indistinguishable]. A lot of other programmes cast from the Workshop: a lot of *Dramaramas*, some of which were fantasy, some of which were more reality-based. A lot of them were cast exclusively from the workshop but they weren't necessarily scripted with the workshop, so it tended to be the ones that I produced to be honest that had the workshop involved right through from concept to casting.

VB: In terms of output from the Workshop, it seems to me that what's coming out in terms of collaboration with the workshop tends to be comedy which is a slightly more flexible genre, I suppose. Other genres tend to be more authored. Is that fair to say?

SN: Yes, that's an interesting point. That does seem to be the way it worked and I don't know why that was. Whether that was to do with the influence of the kids themselves, or to do with the people who were involved in creating the programmes with the workshop [I don't know]. I think that's quite a perceptive remark and I haven't really thought about that before. I'd have to think about why that would be.

VB: I do wonder whether it's perhaps because comedy is more participatory: you tell a joke, you laugh; someone else has also got a joke. It seems to be one of those sorts of those exchanges whereas drama is something that we expect to receive.

SN: Yes, and I think also the stuff that did involve the Workshop in the process was deliberately setting out to be

based on their experience which quite often ended up as comedy, and a lot of the work we did in improvisation ended up being quite funny. That was the kind of way that kids are, or were. I suppose it would be true to say that in drama, yes, it is more authored. Your starting point will almost always be a writer's story. Having said that, there were a couple of Dramaramas that came out of the workshop. We also had a writing competition within the Workshop and one of the Dramaramas that we did was based on something that came out of that writing competition. It was written by a Workshop member who was an albino girl and she was talking about her experiences of being albino and of being bullied-

VB: I think there was a letter into the IBA about that. I was at the IBA archive the other day.

SN: It involved swimming.

VB: Yes, someone was complaining that there was a drama about an albino girl.

SN: Probably.

VB: I was bewildered.

SN: People always complained, much more now because it's easier to complain but that's another story. So that came from the workshop but that was a very specific story that came out of a writing competition we did in the workshop, one of which then got used as the basis of a single drama. It was still authored but the authorship was a child's, and I think that is what it is: that dramas tend to be a specific story which will have come from somebody, rather than from a group.

VB: That does make sense. In terms of the writing competition, I think that's really, really interesting because, again, that's a way for children to be directly participatory which is a key theme in a lot of children's television from the 1970s onwards. Was there any thought in the Workshop that okay, you might never ever get onto television, you might not ever have a starring role, but there were still ways into television?

SN: I don't think that was the initial intention: it was very much about casting and about acting. Of course, it was a drama workshop and it was about improvising and acting, and that was its *modus operandi*, really. However, the side product was that people did different things: writers did come out of it, directors came out of it, a couple of them went off and did their own comedy act at the Comedy Store. They were different things that came out of it. Those who did have the opportunity to work in a professional environment will have had the opportunity to see a professional television crew at work and became interested in other aspects of business. I always used to say, 'This isn't necessarily about becoming an actor: one of the best things, one of the best outcomes, of the Television Workshop, as with all drama groups actually, is that it gives children the confidence to express themselves. They used to get auditions all the time and I used to say, 'If nothing else, you will be so good at interviews by the time you leave the workshop. No job interview will ever throw you because you're so used to standing up there and presenting yourself at auditions.' And there were lots of them. Obviously, the ones who are remembered and known are the ones who became famous actors, your Sam Mortons, and your Chris Gascoynes, and all those people, but lots of them have gone on to do other interesting things which have nothing to do with the business. I'm quite sure because they've told me that their experience in the Workshop has helped them in terms of their

[indistinguishable] confidence.

VB: That's brilliant. I know that Peter Murphy went on and set up another TV Workshop.

SN: For HTV in Bristol and Cardiff.

VB: I don't know whether you had anything to do with those.

SN: Not directly. The Bristol one folded eventually, but Peter Wooldridge who set up the Cardiff one went independent from HTV at some point in the 90s, and he now runs an agency for kids and is still active. Because I'm doing a production in Wales at the moment, some of the kids came from although I haven't been in contact with him directly.

VB: Oh, fantastic. I'm conscious that we've been going for about 50 minutes and I don't want to keep you much longer.

SN: I can talk for England.

VB: well, I'm not going to keep you to that because I know that you must have far more valuable things to do with your time but I wanted to talk about how you made that transition from being in charge of the Workshop to being a producer. Or was there even a transition? Were the two intertwined?

SN: I think they were intertwined and it wasn't a deliberate decision; it just kind of evolved. I was very integrally involved in YMWLI and worked very closely with Peter anyway. And I was involved in an assistant producer capacity on first series of YMWLI. Paul Harrison was the director at the time and when Peter moved off to HTV and Lewis wanted to do another series of YMWLI, the question arose of who should produce it and

Paul Harrison who was directing and was going to be producing suggested to Lewis that it might be a good idea if I co-produced it, [or even just produced it?] That suited him fine because it meant he could do all the things that he enjoyed like directing and I could do all the boring things, which I was more than happy to do because it was my way of working and I really enjoyed that. So I then, at that point, started producing. I learned my trade through initially working with Peter and then working with Paul on the second series of YMWLI but then I think I started to become interested in pitching ideas to Lewis in the first instance for other children's dramas and idea. Eventually, there came a point at the beginning at Palace Hill, [when I reached

Whenever I got involved in producing I had to hand over the workshop to somebody else to run temporarily and I'd reached a point where I felt this wasn't fair on the workshop. It was very unsettling for them to keep having different people running the workshop, so I said to Lewis I'd like to produce full time and hand over the workshop so it was about five into the workshop's life. Lewis was prepared to take a risk on me and so I worked as a producer for him and with him at Central for a couple of years and then I went freelance.

VB: I know about Wail of the Banshee and I know about Palace Hill, but was there anything else that you produced during that time?

SN: At Central, no. It was Palace Hill, then Wail of the Banshee. I did a couple of docudramas: Sticks and Stones, and Home Truths, which were documentaries but with drama inserts.

VB: That's interesting because I haven't seen those. I'll have to look out for them because I'm really interested in the way that

drama fits into other genres as well.

SN: Sticks and Stones was about bullying, Home Truths was about divorce and kids [who were abused? Indistinguishable] better of the two but they were documentaries but with drama inserts and again we used the workshop to do reconstructions. That was particularly useful with the bullying one because you can do things in drama reconstruction which are harder to do in the documentary. That worked quite nicely. Those are the main things I did at Central and then I left Central and went freelance and that's when I did the Coping With ones for Channel 4. So that was Coping with Grown Ups, Coping With Christmas, and then the series: in total, not an enormous amount of hours of television and not that many viewers but Channel 4 didn't get that many viewers. However, it got four BAFTAs, which was-bizarre! It was very much of its time.

VB: I did actually want to ask about the aesthetic and the approach that you took for Coping With... You said it was comedy drama. Is that right?

SN: Yes, and again it was very much with workshop approach so it was a mock documentary, the sort of thing that is now very commonplace but at the time I like to think it was quite groundbreaking. It was pieces to camera so kids in role talking to camera about the problems with grown ups and everything else. So it's like a mock documentary but inserted into that were- it wasn't animation exactly but green screen a little like a comic strip, a flat graphic background with the live-action kids on it, so they'd act out their fantasies.

VB: Was it like those photo magazines?

SN: A bit like that. I have got that on DVD somewhere.

Certainly, *Coping With Relatives* I think I've got.

VB: Again, I don't want to put you to any trouble but it would be great to see it because that does sound really, really interesting, particularly in terms of the aesthetic and how you're sort of distancing the viewer in some respects.

SN: It wasn't fantasy as such; it wasn't a full fantasy drama, but non-naturalistic, a mock documentary. It was a hybrid. It behaved the way that Tracey Beaker did, you know, with its animated inserts and other things in that genre and style. I went in for hybrids, that defied classification.

VB: Why do you think that was: to better serve the story or because it was a particular approach that you employed?

SN: I think because my approach as always been child-led I've always tried to keep the audience at the forefront of my mind in terms of what they want and what they respond to and because [I'd worked with kids in the workshop and was with them on a regular basis?] that was very much at the forefront of my mind with what made them laugh, what they enjoyed, what amused them, what concerned them. It was very much an audience-focused approach. Really, I'm just a big kid myself, I think, so that helped.

VB: That's no bad thing, I would think.

SN: Actually, I think sometimes there was a financial imperative. Interestingly, *Coping With...* had a minute budget and sometimes necessity is the mother of invention, so when you haven't got a fantasy drama budget, how do you do things creatively: in a way that's engaging, funny, and imaginative but doesn't cost an arm and a leg.

VB: Yes, absolutely. There's a drama that comes out of HTV in the early 80s called Jangles-

SN: I remember that! Is that Peter Murphy?

VB: I don't think so.

SN: No, of course not. Early 80s was before his time.

VB: It was Bob Baker and Alex Kirby, who directed a couple of those. They had a similar conceit where real life was black and white and then Jangles was colour.

SN: Alex Kirby worked at Central for a while; he did things like Harry's Mad with the parrot. Have you come across that?

VB: Yes, I have. I actually used to watch that and I think I must have been about seventeen at the time!

SN: That's a little sad.

VB: Yes, I know.

SN: Harry's Mad was also studio-based, or at least a mixture of studio shooting and location work, but then at the other end of the spectrum, you've got Woof! Woof! is a fantasy drama which is all on location, if I remember rightly, much more filmic, and that's just because David Cobham came from a film background. Did Lewis mention [The Secret World of] Polly Flint?

VB: Which is again a lot more filmic, not just in aesthetic but in terms of scope, I suppose.

SN: Well, again, that's David Cobham. But I think a lot of these things depend on who's producing and directing and what their background is. When I started producing my only experience was YMWLI which was studio based with some location work for inserts. That was all I knew, so that was the way I automatically did things. I didn't have that film background that people David Cobham had, so it's just how you come to things, your way in and what you do. I think that perhaps the reason that *Wail of the Banshee* wasn't as successful as it deserved to be was that I was trying to stick with the way of doing things that I knew. People I've worked with since have said, 'Why on earth did you do that as a studio drama? It would have been so much better on location.' And of course they were right but it is one of those transitional ones where the whole world was moving away from studio drama but it just got caught on the end of that when in fact the story really would have been better if it was location-based.

VB: But would you have had the resources necessarily for that?

SN: No, no, and that was partly why we did it the way we did. We had the *Lady of the Lake*, who was a mermaid- Actually we nearly drowned her! Our studio set had those polystyrene rocks and then this lady came out of it in the middle of the bloody studio, a pond! The costume design was beautiful but as soon as she got in the water, the tail became so heavy she nearly sank! It was quite traumatic. God, this brings back memories.

VB: That would have ruined the production, so really it was victory for all concerned! Would you have liked to do more fantasy drama? Was it something that you particularly enjoyed?

SN: Yes, I do a lot more of it now.

VB: But when you were with Central, would you have liked to?

SN: It wasn't something I had an ambition to do; I just wanted to tell the story that I wanted to tell. I was equally happy doing documentaries and doing comedy, and most of what I did in the early days was comedy. That was probably an accident, I suppose, just the way things went. When you get a reputation for being good at something, you have to do more of it. When I went to the BBC in 98, it was as an executive producer in what was then Education productions, so I did a range of programmes, including, but not exclusively, drama, but [my heart's always been in drama?]. Things like *Barnaby Bear*, *Don't Let Go*: they're all from my education days.

VB: And *Look and Read* here as well, which is an institution!

SN: I know. Exactly, but that was a different period in my life again: I started doing [my current job?] in 2007, and came home to drama.

VB: Just going back to Central, was there an idea that children's television was being shaped by voices from the top of the company, or was it very much a philosophy generated within the department? Did you just do what you were doing and you made up your own rules?

SN: As far as the workshop was concerned I did what I wanted to do. We had a steering group where we would discuss what we were doing but there was never [any real issue] Lewis was brilliant; he'd just tell us to 'Get on with it.' In terms of the actual ideas that were commissioned, we had to pitch those. Lewis had to sell them to the Network Committee but there was

never a sense, or at least I was never aware of a sense, [from the top of] ‘This is what we want [you] to do; now go away and do it’. The ideas came from the bottom up, and they either did or didn’t get commissioned but that was the way it worked. Of course, Lewis and other people at ITV were doing all sorts of things that weren’t coming from the workshop so you’re getting a slightly biased view from me because that was where I was at. Woof! and all of the Dramaramas and all these other wonderful things that were happening, I had nothing to do with that, but we were both probably influenced [by each other]. It’s kind of a virtuous [open way?], isn’t it? All these children coming out of the workshop were setting the tone, and then that became the norm, that there would be a majority of children [on-screen].

VB: I do think that’s the case. I do think as I said earlier that it opens up the possibilities for children’s drama, because there are now the child protagonists to be in it.

SN: I do think that’s terribly important. Our philosophy at the BBC, and it’s always been very much my own philosophy, is that all children have a right to see themselves represented on screen. Obviously, that can’t happen all the time in everything you see, but at some point we want children to be able to watch children’s television and say, ‘That’s just like me. I know that character, I’ve done that,’ and that’s really important.

VB: I suppose of course, at both the BBC and ITV, the idea of class does impact on that and when Central and the Television Workshop is getting started it seems to me that it does open up the realm of children’s television to children who might not otherwise have ever been [on it?], as touched on earlier.

SN: Prior to that, any children on children’s drama would have posh, RP accents and it would all be very middle class, and you

would do things like Enid Blyton. There's nothing wrong with that at all but as you say there was this huge opening out. Interestingly, I think it came in the early 80s very much from the ITV philosophy which was regional identity. As I said, Lewis set up the workshop it was our broader philosophy and strategy to actually hear Midlands voices, and the same thing in Yorkshire and Wales and everywhere else. ITV was about regional identity. Ironically then, of course, ITV contracted and became much more commercial and now it's all about the stuff you can sell abroad. It's the BBC that's started to become the champion of regional diversity, which is really interesting.

VB: And I think that's something that the independent companies are contributing to, and I may be wrong here, but there does seem to be more of a representation of regional location, identity, voices, coming through by that route.

SN: And of course Children's BBC moved to Salford as part of that.

VB: I suppose there's the drama that's coming out of BBC Wales as well.

SN: Yes, completely.

VB: Good God, we'll have to wind up. I said I didn't want to keep you!

SN: Don't worry; I'm fine. It's Friday afternoon. Or do you have a train to catch?

VB: I'm actually but for the sake of courtesy I don't want to keep you. This might not be something you feel you can answer, but in terms of differences between the BBC and ITV,

how would you describe them? And I know that this is spread across two completely different eras, but how do you feel things have changed? I know that's a hideously broad question.

SN: In relation to the difference between the BBC and ITV?

VB: Yes, in terms of production for children's television.

SN: I'm not sure I know the answer; I'm not trying to be discreet. I think back in the 80s and early 90s, in terms of innovation and in terms of child representation, ITV led the way. I'm being cautious because I would say that; that was where I was working at the time. Some of the BBC dramas at the time were possibly slightly more old-fashioned in that respect, and then I think it evened out really. Of course, once you get into the early 90s, there was a gradual decline when ITV started to have its financial problems. [And those problems are still happening? Indistinguishable] Anne brogan, who was Children's ITV until its demise and who now running and independent company, did some brilliant stuff but just in terms of volume the BBC then started to do more until now you obviously now you have a point where the BBC are virtually the only people doing drama of any note in the children's area.

VB: I don't want to ask any impertinent questions but do you think that's going to be a long term thing?

SN: You mean will the BBC continue to produce children's television?

VB: Yes.

SN: Well, I sincerely hope so. I think they have to really because there'd be hell to pay if they stopped.

VB: They're the only ones.

SN: Yes. They'll carry on doing children's programmes and within that drama is such an important driver for us in terms of audience appreciation; having said that, it is very expensive and there are a lot of issues. I was talking about that only this morning actually. Just in terms of how that's funded is becoming more and more of an issue, I think, because it's getting increasingly difficult for the BBC to fully fund dramas and third party funding is spread increasingly thin, so that's another issue. But ITV isn't really doing anything, certainly not in children's drama anyway or very very little. Sky's doing a bit but Sky do more family drama; it's not specific to children. It's very different in that what they do is much more internationally focused so you've got things like *Anubis House* on Nickelodeon which is quite American really though it was made in this country. It's good, but it's much more American, it's much more international. They make relatively little and repeat it endlessly. They concentrate on a very few brands.

SN: The same way as Channel 5 with *CSI* repeats, I suppose; you turn it on and there's always something that you recognize.

SN: [Muffled due to background noise: Their strategy seems to be produce a few brands and flog them to death.]

VB: Well, what I thought was quite interesting in terms of ITV not producing anything in children's television anymore was the recent retro weekend they had, which seemed to be papering over the cracks. I know that's a little presumptuous of me to say but it elided the current state of affairs by going that 'Yes, we have this massive history of children's television: [whispers] by the way, we're not doing it anymore!'

SN: They are doing a bit, and they've started doing a little more, to be fair. They have Horrid Henry and Bookaboo, which are very successful, but they can't afford to do drama, not at the scale they used to DO.

VB: Which I think is a real shame. I've got one last question and it's the one that tends to stump people: is there any project or programme that you wanted to make but were never able to, for lack of resources or because the technology just wasn't it there or because it wasn't televisual enough? Was there anything that you really wanted to make but never got the chance?

SN: I don't think so although I'd qualify that by saying there were maybe things that would eventually come into this category, things that I couldn't quite make in the way that they deserved to be made and that would have made them even better. Where the ambition outstripped the technology and finances, where it's difficult to make things to the standard that one could now. If I was making Wail of the Banshee now, I would make it very differently and it would be much better, not because there was anything wrong with the project but simply because certain things weren't available at the time. If there was something I wish I'd made, I'd have done it by now. I'd have found a way!

VB: That's a really good answer and one that I haven't had from anybody else. For personal reasons, I wanted to ask about Wizards vs Aliens. Series 2 is coming up and I think this is going to be the series that is finally going to have the episode in it that was repurposed from the Sarah Jane Adventures season that was never made.

SN: How did you know that?

VB: I read a lot of Sarah Jane stuff! I've written a chapter on Sarah Jane. Is that the case ?

SN: Tell me which episode you're thinking of?

VB: Thirteenth Floor

SN: Yes, I watched the final mix of it only last week and it's very very good.

VB: Yes, because I did read that Sarah Jane Adventures had throughout its entire run various references to previous children's television from decades ago: Mr Smith looking like TIM, the Shopkeeper from Mr Benn...

SN: You know more than me!

VB: Apparently King of the Castle from HTV West was referenced in one of these episodes that we've never been able to see. I love King of the Castle; it's utterly bizarre and built around one set. So I'm very excited to see that.

SN: Have you watched Wizards vs Aliens?

VB: I've seen a couple of episodes but I haven't been able to watch the entire thing. But again as I say everything I'm watching is on DVD. I don't really have enough time, and also I don't have a TV.

SN: How can you not have a TV?

VB: I can't afford the licence fee! My stipend is great. I am

really, really lucky to have it, but it doesn't run to certain expenses and people go, 'Just get a TV.' No, I can't do that; I'd feel awful.

SN: You can use the internet to watch television, can't you?

VB: Yes, exactly but once things are off the computer, you've missed them. You can't get them back unless they're repeated, but the ones I saw of Wizards vs Aliens I really enjoyed.

[Recording ends due to discussion of upcoming WvsA series]

Interview with Alex Kirby: Bristol, November 2012

VB: Ok, I suppose one of the first questions I wanted to open with – what I've really been looking at the stuff that you've directed but I wanted to ask first of all how you got started because I think Bob said that you started off as an editor, is that right?

AK: That's right, yeah. Initially I started out – I was one of the very first students that went to one of the very first film schools in this country which was. My guru there was John Grierson; he was a documentary film-maker and it was Newport Film School. I was one of the very first full-time students there; I think there were five of us. After that, I got a job with what was then Harlech who had just taken over the licence from TWW. They were looking for personnel and I joined the company as a trainee in the cutting rooms. I worked my way up eventually into a film editor and moved to their Bristol studios.

VB: So this would have been around 1968 which is when I think Harlech [took over the contract].

AK: Yeah, yes, my employment started in 1968.

VB: So you were right in at the ground level with HTV.

AK: Yeah, I was a trainee.

VB: Fantastic. Right when it all started as well. So you moved to Bristol and you were working there and what sort of things were you working on?

AK: Well, eventually I was seconded to Bristol and made into a full film editor and because I had a background in film school and also music I got to start cutting quite a few of their programmes that were being made for children. One in particular was called *The Dave Cash Radio Programme*, even

though it was made for television. I think that must have been about 1971. I think they made about ten programmes but it was lots of music, linked together by a sort of fantasy drama of Dave Cash and his assistant.

VB: Oh, really? That's interesting because like I say I'm having a look at fantasy in children's television but it does seem to me that fantasy comes in a lot of different aspects as you were saying, so *Dave Cash Radio Show*?

AK: Yeah.

VB: I shall have a look for it.

AK: Yeah, please. It'll be very obscure.

VB: It just seems to me that quite a lot of the time fantasy is almost used as a framing device for children's television so you've got those Saturday shows called *Outa-Space* and *Zokko!* where the presenter is set on a space-ship and stuff like that, which I think is quite strange and interesting.

AK: But I was quite lucky hitting Bristol at that time because there was a new director of programmes joining; Patrick Dromgoole, who I'm sure you've heard of.

VB: Yes!

AK: And he was bringing in a whole raft of new ideas and new thinking into what was Harlech at the time but the Bristol studios and clearly wanted to make a niche in drama and very much started within children's programming which there was always an opportunity to get onto the network. Patrick was all about that because the regional television structure at the time was really very much a cutthroat sort of organisation. You had the big five companies: Granada, London Weekend Television, Thames Television of the day and Central Television in Birmingham, and they carved up the network general. For the

only small regional programmes, such as *Harlech*, the only opportunity to get onto the network was through children's television hence Patrick's focus on that. *Dave Cash Radio Show* was one of the very, very first that he started making for children which then spun off into drama as I'm sure Bob's told you.

VB: Yes. I've recently been to University of Bournemouth to have a look at the IBA minutes and Patrick Dromgoole is at nearly all of the Children's Sub-Committee meetings, going, "I've brought you this." So I can see that at an ITV level as well, I suppose, but yes, Bob was saying that 1970s/1980s, HTV was a tremendously creative and expansive place to work in terms of children's drama; drama in general, I think.

AK: Very much so, but it started with children's because after the *Dave Cash Radio Show*, along came *Arthur of the Britons*. I was a film editor on that as well. I think there were about twenty six episodes of that; that was terrific.

VB: And of course what's quite unusual, for me, about *Arthur of the Britons* is that it's almost the anti-fantasy, I suppose. It's not filmed in this chivalrous, mythic light; it's very brutal in some respects and sort of historically grimy.

AK: It was very much anchored in the reality or the so-called reality of the period. I mean, it's nothing like *Merlin* now; *Merlin* is just pure fantasy and it's pure magic and very successful as well too.

VB: Yeah. I suppose what's really standing out for me, not just because I'm studying fantasy in children's television, is that HTV West in the 1970s does produce an awful lot of children's television fantasy. Was this happenstance? Was that something that you'd know about or was it a marketable genre?

AK: I actually think it was because Patrick had identified a paucity of programmes within the network schedule and he saw that there were opportunities in children's drama that the other companies weren't actually addressing. So he grabbed that and he used it as a vehicle to spin off his adult drama themes as well because he did a series, around the same time, called *Machinegunner* with Leonard Rossiter and I was film editor on that. My film editing career got me into a lot of the drama that Patrick was producing, and it was because of that that he invited me to actually apply for a trainee directorship.

VB: Oh, fantastic.

AK: And that's how I became a director.

VB: It must have been quite a shift though because I would assume - I'm not fully conversant with television production techniques; the most I've ever done is written a soap opera for finger puppets for a children's TV programme - I would imagine an editor is at the end point and a director, you're right in the middle of the action and actually, obviously as the term implies, directing and making those decisions prior to the actual production of the programme. It must have been quite a shift.

AK: There was always a large- that was one of the difficulties in persuading the Board that a film editor could actually become a director, but if you look at the cinema and the history of cinema there's a traditional route where you get film editors moving into directing and there's a whole raft of directors in Hollywood and British cinema and European cinema, and Russian cinema, where they've come from the cutting rooms and make very, very, very fine directors. So in cinema, in the film industry, it's always been acknowledged as a normal route of actually moving into directing. However, one key thing that actually is common is that, as an editor, as the word implies you're charged with telling the story and the very, very basic

function of an editor is a storyteller. If you can't tell a story, you can't edit. You've got to be able to see the actual thrill of the performances through the characters, through the rushes that you've got, the actual essence of the story and to tell it in an imaginative and entertaining and exciting way. That's the function of an editor. So when you apply that terminology to a director: hey presto! You've got a director. That's what a director is.

VB: Absolutely. That makes sense. Do you think that editors who become directors bring not necessarily a better but maybe a more augmented perspective on what's needed to directing because presumably you'll already have that sort of finished product, that finished narrative, in your mind when you start shooting, which is perhaps not necessarily the case for a director who doesn't come from the same background?

AK: Yeah. I mean, every individual brings a different approach to directing. Every director I've met: totally individual characters. Some have come from theatre, they've come from performance-based. They know the language of acting and actors and performance and all of that. Some directors are writers: purely writers, they've come from the page, but again, what's common to all of them is that inherently they're storytellers. That's the very basis of what the craft is all about: you've got to be a storyteller. You've got to have a vision: I'm going to tell this story; this is the way I'm going to tell it.

VB: Brilliant. What was the first thing you directed then?

AK: Well, the purpose of the job within HTV: because we were a regional television company based in Bristol, and they'd had a number of staff – directors, producers – on the payroll so the staff position was to actually do what you were told which could mean directing the news, directing chatshows, directing current affairs shows, political shows in the run-up to elections.

My very first Outside Broadcast that I directed - and I think I'd only been in the job for two weeks! - was actually a live church service. And therein lies the story: what a wonderful piece of theatre that is.

VB: Absolutely, but also what a trial by fire, I would imagine, because there are so many punctuation points in a church service that you know it's not just editing at the end, I suspect, it's-

AK: It's live.

VB: Oh, of course.

AK: It's live so there's no 'Cut; cameras, can we do that again?' It's actually a live hour's church service from Taunton and it was brilliant because the visuals were so exciting. In fact, I actually had a quiet word with – it was a Roman Catholic service – so I had a quiet word with the altar boys: how much incense do you put in the burners? Because the light was coming through the east window and I'd worked out that the sun would be coming up. If the sun came up, it would come through the east window. I knew I'd got the backlit scenario which was going to be magnificent so I tipped them off to put an extra spoonful of incense in the burners so we'd have more smoke and therefore drama in the visuals. I got into trouble with the lighting director over that but hey, it looked brilliant.

VB: But if you got the effect-

AK: It was fantastic!

VB: So presumably there's again a world of difference between producing something like a live church service and something like a drama.

AK: Therein lies the problem because the majority of programmes coming out of HTV Bristol were kind of day to

day programmes: it was the news, it was the weather, and I was being given shows that were community shows which were *Love Your Neighbour* and all this kind of stuff. There was kind of an element of entertainment in it but because I was actually quite good or perceived as being quite good, as actually holding my own and running a studio and multi-camera situations, I found myself rather trapped. And I'd only really gone into directing to carry on my storytelling function so I had difficulty in then persuading them to give me a drama, but I did. Which was a children's programme.

VB: Which one was that then?

AK: It was actually a series produced by Peter Miller called *The Square Leopard*.

VB: I've read about it; about a solicitor?

AK: That's correct.

VB: Who moves into a flat and pretends to be part of a family, is that correct?

AK: Yes, that's right, that's right, and the series- Peter had hired a director called Jan Donnelly Smith to direct the series but I made such a fuss with Patrick, kept knocking on the door saying, "Which episodes are mine?" He said, "Oh for God's sake, give him an episode and just oversee him," so my job was to actually finally run the studio, put the cameras on. Jan Donnelly Smith directed in the rehearsal rooms, I put my camera script together, went in there and shot it.

VB: And this was the way that you-

AK: Proved that I could do it.

VB: Fantastic. So thereafter, once you had-

AK: I think thereafter it became- Patrick sort of said, "Well, you'd better bloody well get on and do *Jangles* then!"

VB: So right into *Jangles*? Amazing.

AK: Yeah, well.

VB: Because, like we were saying, it did seem like quite a small-scale drama in terms of space because you were basically using the one set for *Jangles* and then you had Chromakey for-

AK: Well, that came out of the fact that we didn't have any money and I said, "Well, how are we going to build the set for the home scenes?" "Oh, we can't build sets." I said, "Well, shall we shoot them on location?" "Oh, we can't afford to do that." Well, how are we going to do this? So Chromakey was beginning to come in and I think we actually used blue screen, and then I made the decision that all the keying elements – I went out in flats in Barton Hill in Bristol and took lots and lots of stills-

VB: Yes, in the first episode, they come up and they're fractured almost-

AK: Loads and loads of stills so we Chromakeyed all these black and white stills in as the background to the set because we didn't have any sets. We had no money. And it actually worked!

VB: No, it worked brilliantly.

AK: It worked, really strangely.

VB: Obviously the music is a vital part of *Jangles* but the way that Chromakey and the insets are used to almost fracture the narrative and then you've got this way that the pop performances are filmed almost completely differently from the drama-

AK: They were! Totally separate with a live audience.

VB: Yes, Bob was saying that it would be an evening filming where they brought in local teenagers.

AK: Yeah, we did.

VB: And it would be the band playing but what I noticed, and maybe it was a deliberate decision, was that a lot of the filming conventions for the pop performance bits are very, very similar to the ones that you get in *Top of the Pops* so you get these sort of sweeping shots around the audience and then low-angle shots of their reaction in the dancing and quite a lot of sequences where the singer or the band are looking directly at the camera, which is not what you get with the drama. Was it a deliberate choice to-

AK: It was.

VB: - to take those two perspectives?

AK: Take totally different styles and actually shotgun them together really. And then of course you had the scenes that were taking place within the club as well, which was that was purely drama and of course we were having to instruct the audience "Carry on dancing, but silently." It's a standard procedure but it was quite strange at that time, because I don't think it had been done like that ever before.

VB: No, I thought it was really interesting.

AK: It was quite ground-breaking. In fact, well, it did get nominated for the Prix Jeunesse which was terrific.

VB: Absolutely. The other thing that stands out about *Jangles* for me is again- it's not just the use of Chromakey but the use of Herald as Greek chorus almost and then the insets where you have two narratives going on at the same time which again is very unusual. It's almost a self-reflexive programme which I think is really interesting. Was that something that came up in the script or was it something that came up a bit later and how did you deal with that?

AK: Herald, the DJ, the-

VB: The Master of Ceremonies?

AK: Yes, the Master of Ceremonies, the Charles Gray sort of idea-

VB: Are we talking Rocky Horror here?

AK: That came later, of course, but then we sort of looked at it and I was casting for that. And it didn't make sense to have that actor there physically because originally it was designed that he was physically going to be a DJ within the club.

VB: Oh, really?

AK: So that he was literally within club and commenting but then when we cast it, the guy, who I think was called David Dacre who was the actor, he couldn't make the dates so we just decided "Right, we'll shoot it all in one day," because that's all we could get and then said, "Right, we've done the Chromakeying, we'll do the Chromakey." So we actually shot that after the narrative drama so that he could spin off what we'd already recorded.

VB: Oh, fantastic.

AK: So it was great.

VB: And also [shows that] necessity is the mother of invention and then it really reinforces what you're trying to say with that programme.

AK: So instead of him being in his DJ booth, we literally did it electronically: had it split screen and then full screen.

VB: I think possibly if it had been in the DJ booth, it would have given a completely different dynamic to the programme.

AK: It would have done, yeah. I think it was much better the way we did it.

VB: I really, really enjoyed it and I know that the people that I showed it to at the open screening really, really enjoyed it as well. So [brief period of garbling]- I'd actually like to use words at some point in this sentence. You were with HTV for quite a while; I was just wondering whether there was anything you could tell me about general working practices or how they approached children's television? Was there a brief given to people before they made programmes? Was there a tone they were going for because I know that the BBC tended to have a sort of institutional approach to children's television drama? Was there something similar going on at HTV or was it, as Bob seems to suggest, pretty much a creative free-for-all?

AK: It was creative free-for-all. It was interesting because sometimes Patrick would come back from the network meetings, saying, "Right, I've got seven slots. We've got to fill them." And he would rush out or pick up the phone or say, "Right," to Peter Graham Scott, for instance, or Peter Miller or these producers or Leonard White, "I've got thirteen weeks to fill: they're half hours!" *Pretenders* or whatever; *Arthur of the Britons* or-

VB: *Children of the Stones*?

AK: *Children of the Stones*, which Peter Graham Scott did. All those kind of ideas, and I think when I was film editor there was another one called *Follow Me* because I actually-

VB: Baker and Martin again.

AK: That's right, and there was a whole load of stuff that used to be made so he'd come back with that, *or* he would take a punt. And I think he probably took a punt with *Jangles*. I think Bob probably took the idea, because it was Jack Allen who'd written the idea, and I think Bob took it to Patrick and said, "Look, this is a really different idea," and he said, "Well, you'd better go and make them."

VB: With *Jangles* there seems to be some sort of, not controversy, but there seems to be a little bit of uncertainty as to who it's actually aimed at. Bob's pretty sure that it was aimed squarely at teenagers but I've read in the IBA minutes for the Children's Sub-Committee that Patrick Dromgoole was saying, "It's for kids: twelve and up." It seems like quite strong meat for twelve year olds, I have to say. I was just wondering whether you'd received any knowledge or whether you felt that there was a certain age range it was aimed at.

AK: We all made it for a teenage audience. Of course we all know a teenage audience doesn't exist. It didn't exist then and it doesn't exist now. Teenagers are abandoned. Children's television, I think in the days we were making that, it was five to twelve [year olds]: that was children's television, twelve being the upper limit. We were pushing the boat out, I think, with *Jangles* and pretending it was for thirteen year olds. It was still technically a children's programme, you're quite right: the IBA sort of- But we felt that it was for teenagers and, in fact, when it did get transmitted, it got transmitted by London Weekend Television on weekends in a strange lunchtime slot.

VB: Yes, because apparently- I'm sorry for interrupting but I've recently just gone to Bournemouth to have a look at the IBA minutes. I believe they put it in that slot because previously *Twentieth Century Box* had been in that slot, with Janet Street Porter, which had been quite teen-oriented so they went, "It'll be fine! Just put it in there." Whereas everyone else went, "We'll put it on at 17.15, just to be safe." At the same time, the IBA Children's Sub-Committee seems to be talking about a lot about this mythical teenage audience. What I'm toying with is the idea that in the early 1980s there's much more emphasis on a teenage audience and teenage dramas because perhaps of the economic and social situation which meant that more teenagers were out of work. Does that seem like something that's

reasonable? Do you feel that there was an increase or an explosion in the amount of programming produced for teenagers around that point or do you feel that it's still very much that mythic audience?

AK: Well, the audience is there. There is an audience; it's just that television doesn't address that audience. Never has done and it doesn't do today. Teenagers are abandoned. I really do firmly believe that. But *Jangles* was for that audience and it got a good response from the teenage audience as well. It didn't patronise them and you call it strong meat-

VB: For twelve year olds! But maybe not for teenagers.

AK: But it was honest. Well, I'm not sure for twelve year olds. Today: *Skins*, *As If*, their teenage audience? They're aimed at teenagers?

VB: No, I don't think so. I think it's early twenties maybe, isn't it?

AK: They're supposed to.

VB: It's like a myth of teenage life.

AK: *Hollyoaks*? Teenagers?

VB: No, I don't think so. I do feel like they create this – I'm sorry, I'm taking over the interview now!

AK: No, I want to know.

VB: I feel like some of these programmes are creating nostalgic teenage years which people in their twenties, thirties, up to early forties, can watch and go, "Haha, teenagers! I remember my teenage years." Maybe it wasn't quite as graphic but I think they get that sense of catharsis in consuming youth culture and feeling young again. Does that make sense?

VB: Yes, it does, it does. And I actually do agree with you on this because that's exactly how *Hollyoaks* goes about its business, having directed some of *Hollyoaks*.

VB: Oh God, I didn't mean to say anything [out of turn].

AK: No, no, it has that philosophy and I think that most of the audience, I think they'll even admit to it, is the audience on the Sunday mornings when the young people are lying in bed with a hangover and gazing at the omnibus edition; letting it wash over them. But getting back to *Jangles*, yes, we aimed it specifically at a teenage audience and I think it worked as a teenage programme.

VB: No, absolutely.

AK: I think the IBA evolution or the television evolution, what happened then was that they actually finally began to think in terms of family programming and hence you had Patrick [doing] *Robin of Sherwood*.

VB: Which again is fantasy; kind of.

AK: It is, but it's something that children would enjoy, and teenagers, and- It's pure family entertainment, much as *Merlin* is today.

VB: And of course *Doctor Who* as well.

AK: And *Doctor Who*, but this was when family drama didn't exist on television, certainly not within ITV at that time.

VB: I think from what I've gathered, and I may be completely wrong here, *Jangles* got caught up in scheduling morass, so to speak, and kind of fell through the cracks a little bit because they didn't know where to put it, I suppose.

AK: And also the transmission was fragmented across the network because of the structure: Anglia Television transmitted it at a different time to Southern Television, I think Westward

transmitted it at different times to Border, so the actual transmission was fragmented all over the place. And of course London Weekend Television transmitted it at Sunday lunchtimes.

VB: Yes, Bob was saying that they'd received some outraged letters from-

AK: It was fantastic, it was terrific. It was really, really good to see them.

VB: Reading those, going, "Yes!"

AK: I enjoyed every single one of them. It proved that we'd actually succeeded.

VB: Fantastic. We talked a bit about the difference between editor and director but you've also acted as producer for a couple of programmes, haven't you?

AK: I did, eventually when I went freelance. Just going back to HTV, the way my career went was that I actually, [with] my regional director's hat on, the job that I was hired to do which covered producing as well, made a programme about a youth orchestra: a documentary which had a narrative story to it. It was a lovely little regional documentary. Cut a long story short: it won an Emmy.

VB: Fantastic. Congratulations!

AK: So that was absolutely brilliant for me; against all odds. Patrick came into my office one day, when I had returned with the Emmy, and he came into my office and he said, "What do you want for that?" so I said, "I want an episode of *Robin of Sherwood*."

VB: You are canny!

AK: He walked across, picked it up, walked out and I got my episode of *Robin of Sherwood* which of course gave me credible

legs within the drama world, in the drama market. So that started it, I got an approach from an agent and then after another year, because I went off to co-direct *Return to Treasure Island*, another family series.

VB: Now, IMDb has that as a TV movie. It's not a serial, is that right?

AK: It was a ten – part: ten one hours, ten episodes.

VB: That's quite a lot, isn't it?

AK: Yeah, it is massive and it was produced out of Cardiff.

VB: *Treasure Island's* in Cardiff?

AK: We filmed it all over the place: in Jamaica, in Spain. It was a big-budget [production]. Brian Blessed played Long John Silver and it was quite massive. And the lead director was Piers Haggard and I co-directed certain sections of it, so again that was a year out of my life and after that I left to go freelance.

VB: Right. And you were a freelance director?

AK: Freelance director, yes.

VB: Presumably then that's when you started to work for the BBC as well.

AK: Well, the BBC made me an offer-

VB: You couldn't refuse?

AK: I couldn't refuse, so I went off and did a drama for them, for their Natural History Unit, based on Jim Corbett. That's the Radio Times cover.

VB: Brilliant.

AK: So that was all based on Jim Corbett, 'Maneaters of Kumaon', which was a fantastically beautiful series of short stories Corbett wrote about renouncing hunting for

conservation. He was one of the very first conservationists in the 1920s so we did a drama documentary, filmed in India, based on his life.

VB: Amazing. How long did that take?

AK: It was a six-week shoot in northern India. It was fantastic; it was lovely.

VB: Yes, I can well imagine.

AK: So there's lot of drama happened.

VB: Yes, and lots of genres as well so I feel like I'm being a little reductive.

AK: Yes, that's right. I was kind of all over the place. It was exciting.

VB: I feel like I'm almost putting you in a box by going, 'Let's talk about the work you've done on fantasy,' but unfortunately as much as I'd really like to-

AK: But storytelling is at the heart of it, it really is, it's the heart of it. It doesn't matter whether it's fantasy or whether it's a reality that is based on fact, as with Corbett, but you know the drama of Corbett's life was about trying to persuade the Raj not to shoot tigers or blow them to pieces, but to actually to conserve them, to respect the wildlife and it was great.

VB: And what year was that in?

AK: I guess that was 1986; that was my first year of being freelance.

VB: Fantastic. That's quite a debut, I would imagine, as a freelancer.

AK: Yeah, but it was good after that because the producer of *Robin of Sherwood*, Esta Charkham- after that she was producing *Boon* so off I went to do *Boon* after that and did a

few series of *Boon*. And that's where my reputation with children's programming preceded me because Lewis Rudd who was head of children's at-

VB: Southern?

AK: Central. And I bumped into him in the corridor and he said, "Good God, what are you doing here?" And I said "Well, I'm doing *Boon*," and he said, "Come to my office this afternoon," and promptly gave me six series to direct.

VB: Six series?

AK: For children. A series of six programmes: a lovely, lovely, charming programme called *News At Twelve*.

VB: I don't think I've ever heard of that.

AK: About a twelve year old boy who has fantasies about running the news from home, and that was very successful.

VB: Oh, I'll have to have a look for that.

AK: Yeah, it was very, very good.

VB: In terms of constructing those fantasies, were you using any particular approaches or was it a basic live-action double-narrative, I suppose?

AK: Yeah, *News at Twelve* was interesting because it was purely this lad's fantasy about "Oh dear, there's been questions in the House today: from Mum", and of course Dad never spoke. And there were political situations with his sister's boyfriend. It was very *Adrian Mole* but prior to *Adrian Mole*.

VB: Fantastic.

AK: We got some lovely comments from ITN because of course it was an ITV production. I went on to do *Boon* and then I felt that I really needed to get back to the BBC and went to do *Bergerac*. Whilst I was doing *Bergerac*, that's when Paul Stone

and Anna Home got in touch with me, again because of my children's background, to go and do the second two years of Narnia.

VB: Which are landmark dramas, really.

AK: Well, 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' was directed by Marilyn Fox and I think there were issues but my agent got the call from Anna and I went to meet Paul Stone who was producing and he loved *News At Twelve* and they all liked the *Bergerac* and that kind of stuff. And they knew I'd done *Robin of Sherwood* and all these wonderful series so they said, "Come on; let's go." So I did; I took over. I did 'The Voyage of the Dawn Treader', 'Prince Caspian', and then we went on to do 'The Silver Chair'.

VB: Those are such huge dramas because they're being used as Christmas programming, I suppose, and also because it's in the great tradition of the BBC and adaptations and the sort of children's classics. Did you ever have a slight sense of trepidation about it or was it just another job with its own challenges?

AK: I was far too worried about turning the page and reading, "The children encounter a dragon on a beach and in the background is the Dawn Treader, and the children talk to the dragon and they climb on its back and it *flies* with the children on its back and it flies round the sailing ship of the Dawn Treader." How to do that? CGI didn't exist! It was challenging, and fun.

VB: I would assume that, at that point, BBC Visual Effects, and I think its spin-off, Video Effects, had come into being by that point as well, were still very much the driving force of anything that was overtly fantastic or kinetic, I suppose.

AK: Yeah, there were two separate departments. That was the physical department and also a very, very embryonic beginnings of a visual effects [department] which encompassed the first computer that they had. But this was prior to computer graphics. This was very cutting edge and between them, I used to have meetings where I'd bring them both together with the design team and say, "Right, how are we going to achieve this?" And of course, the dragon had to be made therefore we got costume involved so it was very much costume, design, visual effects, video effects: the one liner that was; it was one bloke. And then, right how are we going to make this work? And it was terrific. The designer had a fantastic idea about the ship: "Well, we'll just make it in Bristol." So we used a physical ship: we built it and it's floating scenery, as you can see.

VB: Full size?

AK: Full size. Every inch.

VB: My God.

AK: And it was built on a lovely ship called the Carrie which sadly sank a few years ago.

VB: That's incredible; you think these days, you just key into a computer but that's an actual, physical ship!

AK: It is impressive. Yeah, and we went on board and we took it out to sea and we filmed it at sea!

VB: Amazing! So 'Voyage of the Dawn Treader', yes, that must be horrifically challenging: you've got the dragon, you've got the ship, you've got Aslan's land at the end of the sea. How did the challenges differ with the next two then? Were they similar in scope?

AK: Well, 'Prince Caspian', yes, because we had the difficulties of the battles in 'Prince Caspian', and again, with no CGI, we

had to figure [out] a way of how the trees were going to come to save the day in the battle. So we did do a degree of animation but then we had to talk very carefully of how that animation was going to be imposed into the live-action but it had a great design team and because we couldn't afford hundreds of people to fight battles all in costume, we did a lot of sleight of hand. There's nothing better than a good fire in a battle and we burned down a lot of trees which looked terrific on screen but it actually covered the fact that we couldn't do a Hollywood battle.

VB: That's still pretty innovative.

AK: But you know the goodies won in the end.

VB: I think I'm right in saying that previously in the *Chronicles of Narnia* you hadn't really had – Barbara Kellerman in 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' was pretty well-known as a TV actress but overall I think it wasn't really a star programme. There wasn't really any one stand-out celebrity and then in 'Silver Chair', you've got Tom Baker as Marshwiggle. Was that a bit of a departure from the norm, having someone who was already quite well-known in other roles, or was it just another piece of casting?

AK: It was casting. I think it was correct casting. We weren't looking for any star casting but we were looking for a good character actor that could actually pull off a very eccentric role and the more I read Marshwiggle, the more Tom really fitted the bill. But Paul and I looked at each other: "I don't suppose he'll do it," and I said, "Well, if we don't ask, we'll never know," and we asked.

VB: And then he did. Amazing.

AK: But I do find that happens: for instance, the headmaster in *News at Twelve*, I thought Patrick Malahide would be brilliant

so I phoned his agent and then I got a call back saying, “You couldn’t pop the scripts in to [him]?” because he lived in Clifton at the time. So I came home from Birmingham with the script and one Sunday morning I popped round and “There you are, Patrick: the script,” and he said, “Oh, great. I’ve been looking for it.” And he read them and that afternoon he phoned me up; he said, “These are brilliant! I couldn’t stop laughing.” He couldn’t get out of bed because he read them, page after [page]. So yeah, that was it: he did it. And it was brilliant.

VB: Fantastic; again, a happy accident.

AK: If you don’t ask, you don’t get so you’ve got to go there.

VB: Exactly. I suppose one of the things that struck most about *Chronicles of Narnia* - and I suppose I’m regarding *Box of Delights* as its progenitor in some respects - is that it’s one of these programmes that really takes a hybrid approach to creating fantasy so it’s incorporating live-action and it’s incorporating animation, as you were saying, and it’s incorporating physical effects and all of those things are coming together. Is that something, you think, that was specific to the 1980s when video effects and computers were coming in and animation was able to be inserted into the programme?

AK: It was a difficult marriage: getting the animation into live action was amazingly difficult. It’s much easier now but at that time it had to be shot in a very specific way and the animation had to be done in loops. Remember, it was cel animation; it wasn’t being chucked into a computer where you could actually, with an algorithm, begin to animate them. It was all literally hand-cel animation so there was a time constraint between when we shot the material and the actual post-production edit and the animation schedule had to fit that time. That’s the limitation. We couldn’t afford any more time.

VB: I knew it was difficult and I knew it was complex but it's even more difficult and complex than I was at first expecting.

AK: It was.

VB: But did you feel like it was a turning point in terms of how you could tell a story in children's television drama? Did that period feel like something was changing or did it just feel like you were again drawing in technology and effects to make the story that you wanted to tell?

AK: The technology was really very, very primitive. The video effects that we were using were very primitive, extremely primitive, but so long as the camera didn't move – I could not move that camera one inch that had any form of special effects or animation in it so the limitations were huge.

VB: Wow, so it was even more of a challenge.

AK: It had to be shot-listed, those sequences had to be shot-listed and you had to adhere to it otherwise the schedule would go out the window and you would never meet transmission.

VB: So really these sorts of effects, this sort of hybridity, it was only something that could really be used on big programmes. Is that fair to say?

AK: I don't think it was done before: it just didn't exist.

VB: So you were-

AK: Right at the forefront of it.

VB: Cutting edge. Fantastic. But do you think they would have taken the chance on using those effects on a programme that wouldn't have been going out at Christmas, on one that maybe wouldn't have been as marketable?

AK: Couldn't afford it. The computer technology that was actually doing some of the video effects that we were putting

into Narnia, it was massive. I mean, it was a huge Quantel computer. It had to be in an air-conditioned room to achieve the most basic of inserts.

VB: There are a couple of programmes, things like *Take Two* or *Afternoon at Pebble Mill*, I believe, or *Blue Peter* that sort of deconstruct the effects that were being created at that time. When *Box of Delights* was being shown, you had Kay and the Mouse being flown in on the wires, and then in *Afternoon at Pebble Mill*, they showed off Quantel and what it could do but it was very much in terms of “Here’s the next stage of television.” There was never any sign of the work and the effort that went into it, I suppose, so I think that’s maybe where I’ve gone, “Oh, it must be quite easy.” But no, it sounds like it was tremendously difficult.

AK: It was. All the different elements we actually shot against the massive bluescreen and greenscreen in Ealing studios. We virtually converted the whole of a studio into green- and blue-screen where we flew the dragon and we had the kids flying on the dragon but it was all wires; all physical wires. It was very difficult, very difficult because those trapezes and harnesses are not easy to- Acting in wires is not easy, especially for kids.

VB: No, I can imagine.

AK: And also Ailsa Berk who played the dragon, she was inside the dragon to animate it, to fly it.

VB: Really?

AK: Yeah.

VB: Oh, good God. That’s a brave woman.

AK: She’s fantastic. She was brilliant.

VB: With the *Chronicles of Narnia*, I think you said that Marilyn Fox directed the first one and then you came in and directed the next three-

AK: Yeah, 'Prince Caspian', 'Dawn Treader', and then-

VB: 'The Silver Chair'.

AK: And then 'The Silver Chair'.

VB: And there have been a couple of other series where you've directed episodes but not seen the entire thing through.

AK: Correct.

VB: Is it more difficult that way? Or is it something [where] you can just come in and direct it the way that you see it and then move on, or does your direction have to fit into an on-going trajectory, I suppose?

AK: It's like any series you go in, for instance, *Boon*, or *Bergerac*, or *House of Elliott*, which I directed-

VB: My mother wanted me to pass on that that was her favourite programme so you've got a lot of fans in our household!

AK: There's a kind of house style before you get there. Perhaps all the major casting has been concluded but that's your job as a director. You can't direct everything; you just can't do it.

VB: So you have to adapt?

AK: So you have to adapt. Even if you're lead director and you set the tone, you know you can't direct the whole series. I was lucky with *Narnia* because I could, and I did it, and *News at Twelve* and I eventually went on to do- The next thing, I think, was *Harry's Mad*. Lewis got me back to do that. Again that was six-part. It was a story that was a six-parter; we broke it down into six parts.

VB: Again that was physical effects, wasn't it? Or was it? I'm trying to think back. I know I've seen it because I actually watched it when I was younger: actually, not that much younger because I continued watching children's television up until I was about eighteen, much to my shame. But the parrot was really the key element of the fantastic in it.

AK: Yes.

VB: And the premise was that Harry's Mad-Madison [the parrot] – could talk and was sentient, completely, and that was really the main feature of the fantastic, as far as I can remember.

AK: Yes, it was.

VB: So I would imagine that's slightly a more streamlined approach to creating the fantastic in drama than something like *Chronicles of Narnia* but were you still using physical effects for that?

AK: Yes, the secret of Harry's Mad was puppeteering. We decided to go down the puppeteering route because again animation was still very crude and it would have been a nightmare to have actually gone down [the CGI route] those early days of CGI. So we decided to actually go down the physical route so we were going to build a parrot and we were going to make it as close as we could get to a real parrot but it was a puppet. The puppet had four operators and it had to be set up shot by shot by shot by shot, scene by scene by scene, but we got very slick at it and, in fact, the first series was very successful.

VB: I remember.

AK: We ended up making thirty programmes, or thirty-six programmes. We just made series after series.

VB: Obviously it was a great programme in its own right but it seemed like it was really quite a happy confluence of fantasy programming but also children's programming with animals which seems to be another popular genre. And at the same time, *The Queen's Nose* was quite popular.

AK: Yes, that was great.

VB: Which, again, was fantasy drama and quite a lot of animals so there did seem to be that outpouring, I suppose. But from what you were saying-

AK: Incidentally, that was the same co-producer.

VB: Really?

AK: Yes, Film and General Productions, I think it was, and they started off with *Harry's Mad*, co-producing it with Lewis. I think of the thirty-six episodes, I directed thirty of them.
[Heaves a sigh]

VB: So it was a long term gig. Sorry, just having a quick [look at my notes]. You worked on *Into the Labyrinth* as well, is that right? For HTV?

AK: Yes, I did. Yes, I directed an episode of that.

VB: Really? Which one did you direct, do you remember?

AK: The opera one.

VB: I haven't actually seen all of them yet.

AK: The Phantom of the Opera.

VB: I will have to have a look for that one because I have the DVD, but unfortunately I'm currently working my way through quite a lot of other stuff.

AK: I bet you are.

VB: Well, part of the problem seems to be that I have constructed this canon, from 1950s to 1990s, of children's fantasy TV drama and I looked at it and went, "Oh my God, I've made a rod for my own back here." I'm working my way through. But *Into the Labyrinth*, Bob has described it as being able to go anywhere in time as long as you're underground.

AK: Yeah, yeah.

VB: And again it was economically quite restrained because you were in the one set and you had the same core cast so how did you get around the challenges of that?

AK: Well, because we were 'underground', and [in] one of the tunnels or perhaps an offshoot of one of these tunnels *that* week, we found this magnificent chamber and then we got into the Phantom of the Opera. Sort of. The strange singing wafting down the tunnels; "what's that?"

VB: Because each episode was underground, could you differentiate between the two [sets week to week] with aesthetic or shooting style or did they have a large amount of commonality [sic]?

AK: Yeah, there was a lot of commonality but I remember pushing the boat out and saying, "We're going to flood this tunnel in the studio," and stuff like that and people would think, "Oh my God, this man's mad." But it was great.

VB: It sounds amazing.

AK: It was really strange. Chris Harris!

VB: Was that the third series? Because – I think – was it Ron Moody?

AK: Ron Moody, yes.

VB: Was the first.

AK: Yeah, it was Chris Harris I worked with. Again it was one of those episodes that- They were bringing in all these freelance directors from London at that time and I was always knocking on the door saying, “Which ones am I directing?”

VB: “I have no more Emmys to give; just give me something!”

AK: No, it was before the Emmy! The Emmy did the trick.

VB: *Into the Labyrinth*: as a concept, it fascinates me, because like Bob said, “Anywhere you want to go- “

AK: How many episodes were made? It was quite a few, wasn’t it?

VB: I know there were-

AK: Three series.

VB: Three series.

AK: Six or seven [episodes] each?

VB: I want to say seven, but-

AK: Seven, yeah.

VB: There might even be more, I’m not sure. But HTV is doing so much with so little: *King of the Castle*’s just set around this one set as well.

AK: That’s right, yes.

VB: So it intrigues me because, on the one hand, HTV has these big, expansive fantasy dramas like *Children of the Stones*, *Sky*, where you go out on location and you use the local area and then, on the other hand, you’re balancing it with one-set programmes which recycle material over and over. Not material, but you know what I mean.

AK: They were the only ones that I could persuade them to let me get my hands on.

VB: Really?

AK: They weren't going to let me go out there and play with real film cameras.

VB: So it was a trial period?

AK: Until I'd proved I could make films as well. Remember, I was a film editor! So I did know how to do it.

VB: If we could just talk quite briefly about *Bernard's Watch*?

AK: Yeah.

VB: Unfortunately, it's a little out of my time range because I was away to university by that point but my sister swears blind it is the finest children's TV programme known to man. I know that she has told me that it was basically time travel involving a fob watch?

AK: Yes, it was, that had been bequeathed by a granddad but it was this wonderful watch that could stop time except for the protagonist, the boy, so that you came across a busy road and he's in a hurry, he could just click the watch, stop the world and actually run across the road, dodging the stationary traffic. Don't try this at home, kids!

VB: I shall certainly bear that in mind.

AK: And then he'd get to the other side of the road, click on the watch, and everything would be back to normal.

VB: Fantastic. I imagine with something like a busy road, logistically it would be quite easy to create that image of time-freeze: you stop everything, people stops in their tracks and then only the protagonist is moving. But I would also assume that it's not going to be that simple and you're also going to have some effects wherein there are things hanging in air or people are in odd positions or something's about to happen which call for slightly more elaborate effects.

AK: Yeah. What happened in the intermediate years- What years are we in now? But CGI had grown and actually Central children's department had moved from Birmingham across to Nottingham. They had a really terrific CGI department there and we worked very closely with them about stopping time and how we were going to achieve certain things. It was terrific because we used to go over there and literally film a road and we could stop it, freeze it, and then we'd clear it of all the traffic and have the lad run through on a prescribed route which we'd fit in with the frame that we'd prejudged to be the best one. Then all we needed to do was actually replace the cars and he could run through behind them so it was a three dimensional effect. It was a locked-off camera and we could do things like that. It was really good fun.

VB: I was imagining that it would be again some sort of hybrid thing but you're saying that it was purely CGI.

AK: It was done on camera as well. So if the camera was over there and it was a two-shot and I was the boy and I clicked my watch, you'd freeze.

VB: Yes.

AK: And then I'd get up out of my chair and I could come round and I could steal your pen and run out. And then click. Then you'd have to work out how to get rid of your pen and things like that.

VB: So, on one hand, still really quite basic techniques-

AK: That could be done in camera, yeah.

VB: But then with the CGI as well-

AK: With the CGI, we could then separate the layers.

VB: Fantastic, so that's a huge leap in that short period of time.

AK: It was, yeah, and we did that in-house. I'm trying to work out what year we're talking about-

VB: I can tell you because I did print off your filmography.

AK: Oh, well done.

VB: *Bernard's Watch*: 1998, it says here.

AK: Well, there you are, you see; that's eight years. That's nine years from 'Dawn Treader'.

VB: It's still not a huge period.

AK: Yeah, but every week the phone would ring and you'd have a new piece of software. Upgrade your software today, tomorrow! It was all new: terrifically exciting times.

VB: The more I study television history, the more it strikes me that it has developed at ridiculous speeds. Given that it's only really been going for about sixty, sixty-five years, it's just developed so fast from what was originally around. I think around the same time, perhaps a couple of years later, you were directing *Out of Sight* for Children's TV?

AK: Yes, that's right.

VB: Was that using similar-

AK: But all these programmes were interspersed with *Harry's Mad*, I think. Lewis had his- it had seemed to snowball but I always insisted that I took time out every year to go and do *Lovejoy* or whatever.

VB: Was that a conscious decision?

AK: It was, to keep me fresh. You can't keep – It's hugely exciting doing children's television. I love it. Through choice, I would do it but you can't do it all the time. It's nice to go off and have an episode of *Lovejoy* or *The Bill* or whatever, just to actually ground you into performance and theatre and story, to

remind one that you are- I think Bob's the same because he's written loads and loads of children's stuff but he always used to go off and write his adult drama but it's the same process: you've got to do that.

[Recording halts at this point. Subsequent recording switches to iPhone after Dictaphone failed: unfortunately small linking section of interview lost.]

AK: Live action, puppeteering, CGI, everything, everything, animation, the whole works in there-

VB: But in *In the Night Garden* - I'm not familiar with it but plenty of my friends who have young children are regularly on Facebook going *In the Night Garden*, *The Wiggles*, etc., they seem to have this osmotic knowledge now of pre-school children's [television].

AK: Yes, it's been very successful.

VB: But that must be fairly- It's similar in terms of hybrid effects, I would imagine, but the storytelling is similar and yet at the same time it's still for younger children.

AK: That's right: it's pre-school. We did a lot of research into the early years of brain development and children's development.

VB: So is there more of an educational component to it?

AK: There is: it's about learning. I mean, we're talking about eighteen months, you know, very early formative years but the way that children react and behave and how repetition is absolutely crucial because repetition is part of the actual learning process and we found it's best in threes-

VB: Like fairy tales.

AK: Absolutely.

VB: But at the same time, it's not just learning, is it? You're making them- It's active learning so you've got them with the repetition but you're also getting them to do activities. Is that right?

AK: Not really but we found that the kids did; that's the way the kids react. We did a wonderful thing: Upsy Daisy goes and hides behind a tree and we ran some control test sessions. We used to screen sequences that we'd shot with kids, with the young target age range in the kindergarten, and we'd put a camera on the kids so we could judge reactions and whether it was working. And Upsy Daisy went and hid behind a tree but she always had her hair sticking out or her hand sticking out or her leg sticking out and all these little kids were so engrossed, jumped up, run across and behind the TV. Because that's the logic: Upsy Daisy's behind the TV. That's where she is, so if I run around there, there's Upsy Daisy.

VB: Aww.

AK: It's brilliant but it's interesting, the logic.

VB: Yeah, because in a certain sense that logic does make sense: if you can't see them, then there must be something that they're hiding behind, and if you can see that television, that's what they're hiding behind.

AK: The story's about that, what you don't say or what you don't show: editing!

VB: No, good point. How does something like *In the Night Garden* differ? Is it just a difference of approach in terms of something like *In the Night Garden* and children's drama that you've produced previously?

AK: Yes, very much so. It's a totally different world; preschool on that level was cutting edge, it was revolutionary but of

course all those techniques of storytelling and production techniques- of course we dug deep and used those techniques.

VB: I suppose one of the things that struck me was that preschool children, from that anecdote you just told me, react in different ways to the fantasy of television than the older children. Where the older children will see a dragon and perhaps invest a certain amount of belief but they won't believe it entirely whereas that preschool child ran-

AK: Absolutely.

VB: - Behind the TV just to see Upsy Daisy.

AK: But I get that. I get that every weekend here because we've got the dragon in the garden from the ship [the figurehead from 'The Voyage of the Dawn Treader'] and we're known as the dragon house. The kids come round and the grandparents bring their grandchildren round to see the dragon, and some of those kids they can be three or four years old, they won't come in this garden.

VB: Really?

AK: They will not come anywhere near it.

VB: Terrified of the dragon?

AK: They won't go near the dragon! Isn't that interesting and some kids love it: they come rushing in and they love it; love the dragon. But it's the way the human child evolves and grows.

VB: I think that's one of the interesting and tricky academic questions that I'm coming up against: at which point does fantasy become fantasy for children, and at which point does it just become – well, not just become television – but at what point does it become fantasy on television, if you see what I mean.

AK: It's a very strange, shifting line.

VB: Absolutely, and I don't think it's something that can be measured necessarily with the age of the child because, as you just said, children of the same age react differently so some are more open to belief and engaging with the fantastic and some are more interested in something that's more realistic, perhaps.

AK: Well, it's the suspension of disbelief, isn't it? But it's right from the word go with the human being and I think we discovered that with *Night Garden* and it goes right through to – You read a good novel now and you suspend disbelief; you go there: it could be a fantasy novel, science fiction or whatever. It can be completely engaging.

VB: Yes, even if there are things in the way, like- I'm a huge fan of Tolkien, stereotypical geek, but even I have to admit that his prose can be incredibly stodgy. It's like swimming through custard.

AK: It is dense.

VB: But at the same time that was really one of the things that appealed to me because you were required to invest yourself in that sort of stately manner-

AK: Yes, yes.

VB: As much as the fantastic, but also I'd been a bit of a geek for myth: Greek myth and Norse myth so I'd already gone "Well, this is the way that stories are written anyway." It doesn't make sense if it doesn't begin with Once upon a time...

AK: All those different characters in C.S Lewis, all those wonderful – the Dufflepuds and that kind of thing, of course they have history. I discovered where the Dufflepuds came from!

VB: Where?

AK: It's a Hungarian myth!

VB: Really?

AK: Yeah, it's fantastic and I discovered the original. I thought, "Yes! There we have it! Thank you, C.S. Lewis." So it gave me a bit of a clue how to actually visualise the Dufflepuds when we came to do it.

VB: Amazing. [...] Narnia is such a patchwork country: I mean, you've got the satyrs and you've got the fauns and you've got stuff from classical myth but then you've also got Father Christmas, you've got Aslan and everything.

AK: Yes, it's a complete mix.

VB: It is just like a grab-bag of children's imagination, which is utterly amazing to me.

AK: The wicked witch and the green queen and all that kind of stuff.

VB: It is very much the cauldron of story which is just- I love that sort of thing. Sorry!

AK: No, I agree. It's terrific stuff.

VB: I'm not going to take up much-

AK: *Out of Sight*, we were talking about *Out of Sight*.

VB: We were talking about *Out of Sight* and you were saying that it used CGI a lot of the time to create- No, sorry, I was thinking of *Bernard's Watch* but *Out of Sight*, again, I'm sorry, I haven't seen it yet but from what I can gather it's basically a child's version of *The Invisible Man*.

AK: It's *The Invisible Boy*, yeah. You've got it. It was good fun.

VB: Was this a kind of child genius character or was it one of those- I'm going back to stuff like Vladimir Propp here where he goes in the Russian folktales you have a donor character who gives you something and that sparks the entire story off, and

that seems to be the case with *Bernard's Watch* and *The Queen's Nose*.

AK: Where that came from Granddad, yeah. No, this was a down to earth lad who stumbles across, in the back shed because he's a chemistry freak, the secret of this stuff called Inviz, and his friend next door is the brains but together they actually thought this Inviz can be used for good. You can just spray it on yourself and you're invisible. So everything floats around: cups start floating around and all that kind of stuff, so you can have a lot of fun with it. It triggers off a lot of story. That was actually penned by Richard Carpenter who did *Robin of Sherwood*.

VB: Yes, did he also do *Rentaghost*?

AK: Yeah, I think he did, yeah.

VB: And how were you creating those floating cups? Do you remember? Did you do it by CGI?

AK: Yeah, we did a lot of wirework as I recall, and-

VB: Really?

AK: Green paddles stuff like that, and titanium wire. Yeah, [there were] a lot of real effects, made effects, and props but a lot of fun when the bicycle rides down the road on its own. So we then got in the same guy who did *Bernard's Watch*, of course, that same department.

VB: Do you feel like you get a different effect with the different effect? Does that make sense?

AK: It does, yes. There is a difference but the secret of that, I think, is actually combining the two elements so you've literally got a visual effect that's actually staged on the set. I Invizzed a cat as well. We did Inviz a cat. And so literally that can come up, but you have to work out exactly where the wire is going to be otherwise it won't work. It needs to stay upright so you need

to have wires- but then it might be easier just to put the whole thing on a green paddle and then the paddle would move and then you could take a reference point of where you are. Inviz; yeah, I'll have you, cat.

VB: I bet the cat was astounded by that display.

AK: But I mean there was- part of it is physical and part of it is electronic and you mix it and that's the best way of getting away with problems: you mix them.

VB: Was there a difference in terms of performance?

Obviously, I know that the people on-screen are professionals but do you feel like there's a difference for them or is there a difference on screen or is it just aesthetic, I suppose? It's just the best thing for the job on the day.

AK: The kids were always the easiest to direct with special effects: they'd get it instantly and they were way ahead of you. "Well, if you're going to do that, you could that." And you'd go, "Uh, yeah. Really?"

VB: You're still not getting a producer credit!

AK: They were smart; they were never a problem: "You've got to look up there because it's a giant: see that cross on the green screen, that's the giant's face." Yeah, they'd get it. Adults: "Trust me, it will work if you look at the cross." "Oh, I can't go, I can't do this, Alex." "Yes, you can, yes, you can," so –

VB: Adaptability, I suppose? And imagination.

AK: Young in their minds: excellent.

VB: So with the CITV stuff that you were producing, were a lot of the children coming from Central's Television Workshop?

AK: Yeah, Lewis started that off in Birmingham and then when his headquarters moved to Nottingham, he started another workshop up in Nottingham and I think by that time the idea of

the workshops had spread. I know there was one that was instigated in Bristol. Peter Murphy brought the idea into Bristol and it's still going strong, I think. Certainly in Manchester, and of course Anna Scher in London, and I've travelled to all of them, casting, because you do. Casting for children is- every year you've got to recast virtually.

VB: So do you feel like the spread of these television workshops, the spread of children being more available to work within television, has contributed to children's television as a whole?

AK: Oh, absolutely. They were a fantastic resource: I mean, before that you only had the acting schools and you'd have to trawl around. Anna Scher was good but different school have different- There's class difference and if you went to Rose Bruford or Sylvia Young, there were bursaries but it's basically fee-paying. Anna Scher, there were people like Pauline Quirke and that, fantastic successes, and you'd get a real good mix in the television workshops, the independent ones. Birmingham and Nottingham, you'd get kids from a wide range. You'd get Samantha Morton who was-

VB: Spectacular.

AK: Yeah, she's a fantastic star but she was- I think she did a walk-on part in *Harry's Mad*, she did *Woof!*

VB: *Woof!* Oh, I remember *Woof!*

AK: And all of that. She just did a series and look at her now, she's fantastic. Some great, great talent in those workshops.

VB: And I presume that having middle class kids is all well and good if you want to cast for a period drama or one of those programmes where children go off and have an adventure but not so much for portraying actual real life, I suspect.

AK: You always got a mix when you went to those workshops; you'd get them from all over the place. Samantha came from a very dodgy background and the workshop itself actually helped a lot of these dysfunctional kids to keep it together. But they were good workshops because it was a mix from all over the place and it was talent-based. So you were always excited to get there because you were going to see exciting talent.

VB: That sounds like children's television's potential is expanding outwards throughout the 1970s, 1980s, not just because of advancing technology but also because of the involvement of children themselves, I guess.

AK: I think the best children's television empowers the kids and it empowers the kids at home: it says you can do it. It's to encourage them to go out there and think a little differently, so I think even if it's total fantasy, like *The Worst Witch*, it empowers them: you don't have to give up. Don't give up hope, there's a way, you can do it.

VB: I'm glad you mentioned *The Worst Witch* because I did actually just want to talk briefly about *The Worst Witch* and *Weirdsister College*. I think in 1985 they'd done an adaptation of *The Worst Witch* with HBO-

AK: Lewis Rudd.

VB: Yes. Oh! So it was his impetus?

AK: Yeah, it was Lewis Rudd. That was out of Birmingham.

VB: Oh, fantastic!

AK: Lewis Rudd is a fantastic godfather of children's television in ITV.

VB: Yes, I keep coming across his name and I've read a lot of his comments and work in the IBA minutes. But that's a work a long time in the development I would imagine because there's a

Worst Witch coproduction in 1985, like I think I said, and then it comes out in the 1990s, I think, where you develop it as a series. Is that right?

AK: That's right but then-

VB: [Consults filmography] Oh no, 2000 [A.D.]. I would have sworn I watched that when I was a kid.

AK: Well, you probably saw the ITV one with Central Television.

VB: Possibly, yeah, but Mildred Hubble is a bit of an icon. The books have always been tremendously popular so were you in on *The Worst Witch* right from the beginning?

AK: No, I wasn't. No. I'm trying to remember. I can't remember which way round it was. No, I went to do a couple of episodes in one of the series and it turned into more than a couple of episodes. I think I did about three or four of them: I did quite a few of them. And then it was the end of *The Worst Witch* and they thought, "Well, why don't we take it further into and take Mildred Hubble off to college?" And that's how *Weirdsister College* got invented.

VB: But that was quite an original spin-off, wasn't it because *The Worst Witch* books had been around for quite a while before then. I believe it's Jill Murphy who wrote them.

AK: It is indeed, yes.

VB: And then was she involved in *Weirdsister College*?

AK: Yes, she was. She was involved in the ideas and the thinktank. I remember her attending some of the- We had a pool of writers who were basically doing the screenplays for *The Worst Witch* and we eaten all of Jill Murphy's stories up, but she did take part in the writers' meeting where we had an open day where we all got round the table and talked about where

The Worst Witch could go: college and what kind of storylines and how could it develop. The producers really wanted to push it more towards teenagers.

VB: Interesting.

AK: So some of the magic got quite dark.

VB: Oh. Oh, that's quite-

AK: In *Weirdsister College*.

VB: That would be just after the period when *Buffy* became really popular, wouldn't it?

AK: It was before *Buffy*.

VB: Really? Interesting.

AK: But obviously I don't think that ever came to pass, so *Weirdsister College* became more of a children's drama again.

AK: Yeah, we did one series and that was it. And then the funding in ITV more or less collapsed. We wanted to do another series. In fact we'd got all the storylines together for that as well but they pulled the funding. ITV Children's was in disarray by that time, sadly.

VB: But the way that magic's portrayed in *The Worst Witch* is- Well, one: it's portrayed as everyday because they're in a school environment and it's just what they do. They are witches: that is their *raison d'être*. They are there to be witches and do magic. And it is the sort of thing where I saw one episode and Mildred Hubble turns into a tree and that's quite innocent and the effect is fairly simple. So what were they thinking of doing with *Weirdsister College*? Was it going to be more elaborate?

AK: Well, once Mildred went to college, of course, it was a mixed sex college so we had blokes there.

VB: Always a bad idea.

AK: And there was one of the lads, one of the students, called Hobbs-

VB: This wasn't a deliberate reference, was it?

AK: And he represented a darker side.

VB: Interesting.

AK: So he was all for meddling with things he shouldn't meddle with, and opening gateways to-

VB: Other dimensions?

AK: Yes; rather more sinister than the [fun things?]

VB: Oh, that's interesting.

AK: So it got a little bit out of order.

VB: So as the character motivations deepened, were the visual effects going to be much more complex at the same time? I would imagine it would have to be.

AK: Well, we had a wonderful palette of characters: they were fantastic, some of these old lecturers and the sets themselves were magnificent because we kept it kind of Gothic. We based it basically in Cambridge and that's the spires and the Colleges there. I think we used the exterior of Caius College.

VB: Wow.

AK: So there fun and games were taking place in this kind of timelocked place but Gothic college for magic and so we could extend it into quite a few different areas. So there was conflict and competition between the old school lecturers and the new, some studying for their PhD and doing research into what they shouldn't be doing.

VB: I don't think my PhD's like that!

AK: It was great. We got into alchemy and transmutation, which led into-

VB: Oh, fantastic. I'm going to have to look for it now.

AK: We had great fun doing it. It was brilliant; I loved it. I directed six of those episodes. Great stuff.

VB: One of the things I actually wanted to ask about *Worst Witch* was which do you think the fantasy bits were? Was it the magic or was it this fantasy of boarding school? Because it seems to me that school stories have kind of gone a little bit out of fashion, but in the early part of the twentieth century that was the uber-fantasy for girls. You would go off to boarding school: it would be *Malory Towers*, it would be *St Clare's*, it would be *Dimsie*, whoever. I feel like the school story's as much of a fantasy these days as magic. Does that seem reasonable or- I mean, I'm asking you to speculate now but-

AK: I don't know: possibly?

VB: I suppose what I'm asking is-

AK: I think *The Worst Witch* did appeal to the girls. There's a problem with *Worst Witch*. Which came first: *Worst Witch* or *Harry Potter*?

VB: In terms of the books? *Worst Witch*.

AK: So what's *Harry Potter*?

VB: School story.

AK: Yeah.

VB: No, I see where you're coming from.

AK: It's just a gender change but it's interesting that *Harry Potter* had that massive success whereas *Worst Witch* didn't and I've speculated that it's actually just gender.

VB: Yes, it wouldn't surprise me because it does seem that in early children's TV, BBC stands out particularly, they're saying, "Well, shouldn't we have programmes for girls?" and they're like, "No, anything that boys like, girls would like but anything that girls would like, boys wouldn't like," so-

AK: Yes, I agree with you. Isn't that weird?

VB: It is. At the same time, I feel like- not to sound too pretentious about this, I think it's part of our culture at this point: that we tend to valorise the masculine in terms of the public life so we kind of go, "Well, girls will fit in with it, girls will find something to like in it."

AK: But isn't it strange that girls do like the *Harry Potter* thing, they do like the male protagonist?

VB: Yes, but I feel like sometime though it's almost projection rather than necessarily identification.

AK: Yeah.

VB: I know that's getting a bit sort of-

AK: I think it is. I mean, we did try to mix it with *Harry's Mad*: we changed the casting one year so it was a girl and I think that was the last series.

VB: Wow. It's difficult to make out what-

AK: It's just terribly difficult.

VB: And of course one of the things: even if you do see something in the minutes about programmes for girls, it's *Horse in the House* or something about babysitting or-

AK: It's dreadful to go down that stereotypical route.

VB: Which is why I've liked-

AK: This is why I always think we should empower the kids. Gender's irrelevant but if it's girls, I want those girls dabbling with magic and to challenge their thinking and where they are.

VB: No, I completely agree: I think that's admirable.

AK: That's what children's television is about: the best children's television succeeds on those levels, I think.

VB: One of the things that I've really enjoyed watching recently has been BBC's *Wolfblood* which I think has some of those same issues and concerns and has a preteen female protagonist who is a werewolf. They call it *Wolfblood*. But I've been really interested by the way they've put that narrative together.

AK: Good.

VB: One last thing and then I will leave you in peace: *Frankie Stein's Robot*.

AK: Oh yes!

VB: Apparently it's part of a European Broadcasting Union Drama Exchange.

AK: It was.

VB: How did that come about and why is it science fiction/fantasy? Was there a reason for it?

AK: Again, that's Lewis Rudd! Lewis, I think-

VB: I think he's going to have to be thanked in my thesis notes.

AK: You really should go and meet him.

VB: Well, I'd like to. I don't really like to presume. I mean, Bob had a website-

AK: You've got to!

VB: That's how I got in touch with him.

AK: I think you should get in touch with Lewis.

VB: Where's Lewis based now?

AK: I don't know: I'll give you his number.

VB: Oh, that's very kind but do you think he would mind?

AK: I could phone him and check it out first.

VB: Oh, if you could do that, I'd much rather because I don't want to put him out and I don't want to put him on the spot.

AK: He is brilliant.

VB: I'd love to meet him, I really would.

AK: He championed children's television for ITV for all those decades.

VB: I know: all the way through the IBA minutes-

AK: Goodness knows I can't place *Frankie Stein's Robot*: I happened to be there doing *Harry's Mad* or something and he said, "Oh by the way, we're doing EBU this year so- you'd better do it." [Laughter] They were fifteen minute programmes, I think, or up to twenty minutes or something.

VB: I think one of the things I've picked up from reading about the EBU Dramas was that it had to be something that translated visually.

AK: Yes.

VB: Not necessarily linguistically but something that would-

AK: Yes, so spoken dialogue must be kept to the basic minimum because I think there were fifteen EBU [members], fifteen other nations including Israel and South Africa.

VB: Wide selection!

AK: Yeah, who were involved in the EBU co-operative, I guess, and the idea was that each and every contributing nation would do a fifteen minute film or twenty minute film and it could be dubbed into any language. So if it needed to be dubbed into Serbian, it was fine, or French or German or whatever, for Sweden or Norway, so it was easy. It was good because you got different cultural aspects. The idea was that we would screen them all but of course there were quite a few untransmittable ones.

VB: Was that due to technological constraints or just because they were shocking?

AK: They were poor: the production values were non-existent. Lewis used to cherry-pick the best of the bunch.

VB: Were you just given a script or did you come up with it?

AK: No, no, we looked around and I think I'd been working with a writer called Roy Apps because I was working for the BBC. I'd done a series for the BBC called *No Sweat*-

VB: I think I've seen that but I can't remember.

AK: Yeah, and Roy was lead writer on that series. Basically, *No Sweat* was about a boy band and it was a dramatization about that pop band. It preceded-

VB: One Direction?

AK: Yeah. It preceded all those- Seven Up and that kind of stuff, all those pop bands, all the Simon Fuller stuff. It was quite strange: it was co-produced with Initial which takes us back to Malcolm Geary who produced *The Tube*.

VB: So full circle?

AK: So it all goes round. Anyway, to cut a long story short, I'd been working with Roy and Lewis said "Have you got anything [for the EBU]?" and I said, "Roy can you come up with some

ideas, just one-liners,” and Lewis said “Oh, that sounds fun: Frankie Stein’s Robot.” It’s a pun and we could have lots of fun, and it’s about a lad who builds this robot to get him out of trouble and, of course, it does everything but. It gets him into deeper and deeper trouble. Therein lies the moral of the tale.

VB: Yeah, absolutely. Did it have to have a moral?

AK: No, it just happened; it was just light-hearted. Things can get out of control: it might be the best idea you’ve ever had but there’s always a consequence, which is lovely.

VB: Well, obviously that’s something that resonates across several cultures.

AK: It does.

VB: You’ve got the golem in Jewish culture and then you’ve got the Frankenstein myth.

AK: Exactly.

VB: Yeah, so it sounds like a really nice way of again translating across cultures. How did you construct the fantastic in that then? Was it just live action or-?

AK: It was live-action and minimum green-screen and stuff like that, but a lot of physical props and the convention of it was that the narrative form was got over by narration so it was a told story. So it was almost, with the visuals, almost kind of like *Jackanory*, [...] in very simple terms, that sort of approach. It was a lot of fun.

VB: That approach is tremendously effective, as shown by *Jackanory* itself. Just one last question: did you pick *Frankie Stein’s Robot*- I suppose, my ultimate question is: do you feel like fantasy and science fiction in children’s TV is more marketable, a more easily translatable genre that perhaps something a bit more realist? Would you be able to sell

something that's fantastic more easily than maybe something like *Byker Grove* or, I don't know, *Running Scared* or *Break in the Sun* from earlier years?

AK: Yeah, I think fantasy has a much wider market from what I know of: the sales for Narnia were massive, sold to endless countries. So there's obviously a world market for C.S. Lewis and the *Chronicles of Narnia*. We saw that in Hollywood picking it up and remaking them as blockbusters.

VB: Yes.

AK: Which I thoroughly enjoyed.

VB: I was bracing myself for you going-

AK: No, I did; I loved them, especially all the bits they stole from the BBC series which are not in the book!

VB: Do you know I didn't even notice that? Which bits are those?

AK: The kind of staging that I'd invented, the methods of getting the kids back to the UK and the arch at the end of 'Prince Caspian', which I'd found on location and it was a physical folly. It's a beautiful location, stunning physical location and when I went to see *Prince Caspian* in the cinema, there was the arch!

VB: "That's my arch!"

AK: And I got the kids coming back through this Gothic arch and it was wonderful, but I did it because it was there, because it was a perfect way of doing it for me, and they'd gone to huge expense recreating that arch and I thought- [claps hands]: done it! And there were lots of things. I thought that Dawn Treader, our Dawn Treader, was a lot better than theirs.

VB: Oh yes, by miles. I went to see *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*-

AK: And what on earth did they do with the story?

VB: I wasn't sure.

AK: That was insane, and the casting of those so-called children-

VB: I went to see it with a friend of mine- I do love Edmund and Lucy in the films and yet, and yet, what the hell were they using Ben Barnes for if not to tap into the heartthrob market? Which- and the story- You were right. It was very much like the moment I came out of *X-Men 3* and I turned the air blue, and people were hurrying their children away from me. And I came out of *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* and my friend Fay who'd very patiently gone with me to see - it doesn't know anything about C.S. Lewis, doesn't really like fantasy - came out and went, "I quite liked that!" And I was like, "Are you mad?"

AK: Noooo, what are you talking about? But there we are, that's what happens when Hollywood gets hold of something.

VB: Yeah.

AK: The thing we wanted to do at the end of Narnia and we really, really did, and Paul Stone had lunch with Christopher Tolkien and we tried very, very hard because we really desperately wanted to do the first Tolkien story, *The Hobbit*.

VB: Really? Oh, that would have been interesting.

AK: Because it would have been perfect and Anna Home was all for it, and Christopher Tolkien's a weirdo and he wouldn't play ball. Because it splits up beautifully into six or seven parts.

VB: Because again it would have been a beautifully- like *Chronicles of Narnia*, like *Box of Delights*, it would have been landmark programming.

AK: It would have been brilliant, and we had the guy to do it: Warwick [Davis] who played Reepicheep.

VB: Really? Warwick Davis? That would have been amazing.

AK: Yeah, because he played Reepicheep for us.

VB: Oh, well, now I'm heartbroken that I will never get to see that.

AK: But there we are. But they are making it, aren't they, as we speak?

VB: Peter Jackson? I think it's coming out this December.

AK: This December?

VB: Yes.

AK: Oh, cool, I hadn't seen any trailers for it.

VB: There is a trailer, I think; maybe I'm just wrong and they're advertising it for next December but I think I have seen a trailer and I was actually considering saying to the University of Leicester, "Is the University film theatre available for a day so that I could screen back-to-back *Lord of the Rings* before the release date," but we'll see. Listen, I am going to get out of your hair because I'm aware that I've taken up far more of your time than I intended to.

AK: That's all right! It's been fun, hasn't it?

VB: It has. I've really enjoyed this and it's been so useful. Thank you.

AK: I hope so; I hope you're getting something out of this.

VB: No, absolutely. Obviously, as I said, I'm going to transcribe this interview and then I'll send you a copy. You make any alterations and amendments that you want to, edit anything out that you don't want in there and send it back to me, and that is fine. The finished version of the interview that I will use is one that you are happy with.

AK: Are you going to see the real wonderful people like Anna Home?

VB: I would like to but in some cases, they are very hard to get in touch with. I would love to talk to Patrick Dromgoole because I would like to do a chapter on HTV West and its children's output but I am also aware of the fact that they are really important people in TV, they are very hard to get hold of, and I am a little squirt of a PhD student. What is happening next July is that University of Leicester is actually hosting a conference on childhood and the media and I'm kind of pushing my thesis supervisor to get Anna Home, get Russell T. Davies, get Lewis Rudd, then I can interview them after they've come to the conference. If you think Lewis Rudd would-

AK: Lewis is still active, yeah. I think Lewis would be happy to see you.

VB: Like I say, I would be delighted but I do not want to just turn up-

AK: He can fill in the [gaps]; he's got that continuity. He has a wonderful story of some programme controller at Thames Television driving down the street in London in a cab, stopped the cab and leapt out: "Lewis, just the man! Come and see me tomorrow morning in my office; you're Head of Children's ITV." End of. And hurried off, some director of Thames TV or something, and Lewis turned up the next day and they said, "Right, your office is down there. You're Head of Children's; end of. Get on with it."

VB: Oh, amazing.

AK: And that was it! And then thirty years later, he's still doing it. He's in Carlton; he's fantastic. Anna and everyone will say, "Lewis kept the ITV boat afloat and Anna kept the BBC afloat."

VB: Well, this is the real thing, that you can kind of put together some idea of what's going on in BBC Children's TV from the Caversham archive but there's nothing for the ITV side because things have been junked, people have taken them, they've just disappeared, so it's really difficult to get an holistic idea of what's going on across the network and then in different companies. So if you think [Lewis Rudd] would be willing to talk to me, I would love to speak to him but, like I say, I don't want to [presume].

AK: Well, I'll drop him a note and see what he kind of response I get from him.

VB: That would be lovely, thank you. Fantastic; I'm so grateful just for you to ask the question.

AK: If he says yes, do follow it through because it would be good.

VB: No, I will do, absolutely. The only way I have of contacting Patrick Dromgoole is through Linked In, apart from-

AK: Really?

VB: Yes.

AK: Not Bob? Bob would put you in touch with him.

VB: Is he still in touch?

AK: Possibly. I think Bob does occasionally touch base with Patrick but I don't. But I did get my Emmy back!

VB: Because I know that he lives in a castle up in Scotland. If anything is going to put you off getting in touch with someone-

AK: No, it's crazy; he's a madman. But he was a maverick, you know.

VB: I know. He was just taking so many chances with- It's not even a solely economic chance-taking because he's so willing to let people go ahead with what they were doing.

AK: Yeah, but he sold it to the Board by saying "Look, it's giving HTV a presence on the network, a network presence, which you're never going to get unless you go there and grab those opportunities." People all over the nation, all those kids, would start watching the programme and up would come the HTV logo. So he sold it to them like that.

VB: Well, I have noticed in several of the Children's Sub-Committee minutes, he comes to the annual meeting and goes, "I've got this programme to show you," so it's shown immediately before the annual meeting and then everyone goes, "Oh, that was marvellous, we'll have it for-" He does sell primarily for the Sunday serial slot because it seems to be more prestigious and it carries that marker of quality. They're going to put quality drama in Sunday slots so he's very canny.

AK: Oh, he was!

VB: It's just amazing to read through and watch how he politicks.

AK: The *Robin of Sherwood* thing, he did it with Goldcrest and Paul Knight produced it but it was- He said, "Yeah, OK, we'll make it." He didn't have a slot for it! He was fantastic, absolutely astonishing.

VB: You're right: he was a maverick and just took chances, and they paid off.

AK: But you wouldn't last ten minutes now. Sadly.

[End].

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File 5003: Children's Programmes Vol. XI – Jan- Dec 1974

File 5003: Children's Programmes Vol. II – Oct 1975-Dec 1976

File 5003: Children's Programmes Vol. XIII Jan – Dec 1979

Interviews

Bob Baker:	Bristol, January 30 th 2012
	Bristol, November 16 th 2012
Catherine Czerskawa	Email interview, May 9 th 2013
John Dale	Bournemouth, August 13 th 2013
Bob Hescott	London, September 6 th 2013
Anna Home	London, 21 st June 210
Alex Kirby	Bristol, November 16 th 2012
Sue Nott	London, August 16 th 2013
Ray Ogden	Phone interview, May 12 th 2014
Lewis Rudd	Phone interview, 9 th July 2013

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