

# *Citing the classics: constructing British television drama history in publishing and pedagogy*

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Bignell, J. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4874-1601>  
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# 2 *Citing the classics*

## *Constructing British television drama history in publishing and pedagogy*

*Jonathan Bignell*

This chapter addresses the theoretical and pragmatic issues attendant on the selection of programmes that delineate histories of British television, especially television drama. It focuses on the relationship between published television historiography and the formation of canons in the institutions of academic teaching and research. Beginning with a critical analysis of recent publications dealing with British television drama from the 1960s to the 1980s, the chapter moves towards a focus on the consequences of citing selected programmes as examples. This issue illuminates the tensions in historiography between presenting, explaining and narrating histories of British television drama for the different audiences of students, academic researchers and non-specialist readers that published work addresses. This tension is evident in the convergence and divergence of discourses that set in place a selection of programme examples as representatives of historical periods, tendencies or turning points in television drama, for there are two aims that shape these discourses. The first is the requirement to choose examples that will stand in for a broader grouping of programmes, and thus the choice of an example depends on its function as typical rather than exceptional. At the same time, however, the selection of an example makes it exceptional simply because it has been chosen from the wide but not infinite field of other possible examples. In this construction of a canon, those programmes privileged as examples become a series of relays that connect the historiographic discourse to an absent history that they represent. Critical discussion of this kind of canon is concerned with the accuracy of the representative history thus constructed, and the ways in which new research or theoretical insights might reshape that history, perhaps by questioning the example's representativeness or choosing alternative examples that fulfil the representative function more accurately.

A second historiographic discourse that is inhabited by the tensions inherent in the aims and audiences for work on television drama is the writing that uses

programme examples as occasions for theoretical and methodological work. Here the example is not chosen for its representativeness but, instead, for its function as a resource that enables a theoretical or methodological insight to be concretised, worked through or tested. In this discourse, the example still has the function of a relay that leads to something else, but as a moment in an argument that begins from a conceptual problem, grounds it in an object of analysis and then returns to conceptual discussion, having bolstered its claim to truth and utility by application to a text. Each of these two kinds of discourse constructs canons, and do so by necessity. There is no possibility of avoiding the formation of canons inasmuch as the term refers to a privileged selection from a broader field, and the reiterative process by which subsequent work by other writers will necessarily engage with, refute, avoid or forget the canonical selections proposed by its antecedents. The extensiveness of television, broadcast on growing numbers of channels and now often for 24 hours a day, also means that selection is perhaps more challenging and equally inevitable as it is in media with longer histories, such as film. Therefore, this chapter does not constitute an argument against canons but, instead, an argument about the stakes and consequences of the process of canonisation.

### THE STORIES SO FAR

Writing about British television drama is now sufficiently established to have its own history, and this section is a very brief commentary on books that have attained the status of landmarks and turning points in that history. These are some of the texts that are recommended to students studying television drama, and that writers contributing new work use as models, coordinates for positioning their own work or 'straw men' from which to differentiate themselves.<sup>1</sup> There are, therefore, two interacting processes of canonisation at work. One canon is the selection of programmes that persists or changes across the development of writing on television drama, and the other is the group of published studies that have been adopted for teaching purposes, or cited as reference points in research, thus mapping the field and representing its coordinates. These two kinds of canon interact, and to an extent legitimate each other. Publications on television drama implicitly select a canonised group of programmes, and those publications themselves become canonical partly because of the programmes they use to ground their critical insights. The early work in the field engaged with television drama through authorship, because methodologies for discriminating quality, political effectiveness and formal innovation could be exemplified in the single television play and the prime-time high-profile television serial, forms that already privileged authorship as both a differentiating brand and a guarantor of quality for broadcasters and reviewers. The essays in George Brandt's edited collection *British Television Drama* (1981) each address a different writer's work, analysing

selected examples. These studies legitimated their criteria for selection by drawing on criteria already dominant in the study of literature and theatre drama, such as complexity, social engagement, originality or ambiguity. Unsurprisingly, the resulting selection of programmes consisted of dramas by established male writers of 'serious' television plays or serials. By 1990, however, John Tulloch's book *Television Drama*, significantly subtitled *Agency, Audience and Myth*, combined work on Trevor Griffiths' authorially branded television drama with empirical research on Australian viewers of popular drama such as *The Flying Doctors* (Crawford Productions, 1986–1991), and explicitly contested what Tulloch saw as Brandt's conservative, patriarchal and 'high-cultural' canon. Tulloch's work questioned the hierarchisation of drama into the 'serious' and 'popular', and signalled an interest in reception that became increasingly important to studies taking their methodological bearings from sociology and anthropology as much as from literary traditions. The selection of programme examples thus shifted from an implicit – and sometimes explicit – discrimination of quality in texts to the use of texts as locations for considering the competing claims of authorship, genre, institution and reception as agencies determining the cultural meanings of programme texts. The canon began to be not only a group of programmes but also a group of critical approaches, drawn mainly from cultural theory, that could be instantiated and developed for the analysis of television by means of their application to programmes.

The essays in Brandt's second collection, *British Television Drama in the 1980s* (1993), were organised around analyses of programmes, rather than writers, and placed some programmes in relation to genres such as sitcom and soap opera. Authors' names still featured in each essay's title, and Brandt (1993: 17) wondered whether the 'best' television drama of the 1980s was 'the golden glow of a setting sun', defending text-based evaluation against the redemptive readings of popular texts that granted centrality to the negotiation of meaning by real viewers or from hypothetical reading positions. Generic programmes such as *Yes, Minister* (BBC, 1980–1984), *Brookside* (Mersey TV, 1982–2003) and *Inspector Morse* (Zenith, 1987–2000) were implicitly canonised by their selection as examples of how such negotiations opened up the multiple significations of apparently conventional forms. This connected earlier criteria for quality with the new valuation of popular television as potentially resistant as well as hegemonic. By this point, the disputes about canonicity in television drama and the legitimisation of canons by critical concepts such as authorship, genre or ideological stance had become sufficiently insistent and clear that Charlotte Brunson (1998) could undertake an important meta-critical analysis of academic publishing on this subject, illustrating it by reproducing the title pages of recent studies within her own article. Robin Nelson's *TV Drama in Transition* (1997) began with a demonstration of how critical emphases on authorship, the single play and a lament for the lost 'golden age' missed out on the increasing dominance of popular series drama in 1990s television, and also failed to account for audience response, the

importance of genre as an organising principle of meaning, and postmodern questioning of evaluative methodologies of all kinds. Nelson's examples shifted the terrain of debate by including US drama series such as *NYPD Blue* (Bochco Productions/Fox, 1983–2005) along with the critical realist serial *Our Friends in the North* (BBC, 1996). The examples he cited did more than just show a transition in television from the location of quality in the authorial work and textual value of the British single play to the genre negotiations, narrative flexibility and self-consciousness of popular British drama and imported US series, however. The transition from authorship, social engagement and 'seriousness' to the valuation of audience pleasure and agency were not regarded as opposites, and *Our Friends in the North* was used to argue that critical realism, a mode seemingly derived from that authorial 'golden age' past, could offer its audience grounded recognition of television drama's relevance as a kind of pleasure.

Nelson's selection of *Our Friends in the North* was important as a way of connecting an earlier critical tradition with a current one, by means of a programme that drew on aspects of realism that belonged to earlier drama forms, and dealt with an ensemble of characters whose life histories were themselves mapped from the 1960s up to near the present. The re-evaluation of past drama in terms of more current methodologies, and the re-evaluation of past methodologies in relation to current programmes, motivated the collection of essays by television writers, producers and academics that I collaborated on (Bignell, Lacey and Macmurrough-Kavanagh, 2000) at that time. The book brought together analyses of recent examples, such as dramas by the emergent writer Lynda La Plante and by the already canonised Dennis Potter, and contributions from 'golden age' writers and producers as well as those still working in the industry. Around the turn of the century, publication on British television drama historicised itself and its canons, and in 2000 John Caughie's work on aesthetic debates around naturalism, modernism, realism and authorship returned to 'serious' drama. He historicised discourses of seriousness and quality, and located them in specific cultural debates. In the same year Jason Jacobs' (2000) study of British television drama from 1936 to 1955 developed a self-consciously archaeological approach, reconstructing drama aesthetics from production notes, set designs and scripts because of the lack of archive footage to analyse in detail. For different reasons, studies of television drama were written with much greater reflexivity.

In the last few years the tensions in exemplarity have resulted in the co-presence of several different kinds of writing that deal in different ways with canonicity and exemplarity. Lez Cooke's history of British television drama (2003) is a chronological narrative that begins with the live productions of the 1930s and ends with the high-concept authored drama that attracted large audiences in the 1990s. By periodising drama into decades, Cooke (2003: 5) identifies 'broad tendencies in the historical development of British television drama', and also turning points that crystallise historical processes in key texts. Examples and narrative history are yoked together productively but in a necessary tension. The

same tension inhabits Michele Hilmes' 2003 collection, which begins as Cooke's does with a debate about historiography. Hilmes' collection has two sections on programmes, but among these 53 pages there is only one essay (Wheatley, 2003) that grounds a historical account in an analysis of a British drama programme. Nonetheless, the widespread adoption of the publishing format of the 'grey box' in Hilmes' collection, now very common, concretises the tension between narrative and example. The separation of brief analyses of programmes on the page in a grey box both foregrounds the issue of citation and exemplarity but also conceals it, as a feature of the format, rather than facing it head-on as Cooke does. At the other end of this spectrum, Glen Creeber's (2004) selection of 50 key television programmes includes examples unframed by a historical narrative. In effect, these examples are all grey boxes without the surrounding historicising discourse. The story of the histories of British television drama is the story of how transitions in criteria for selection have changed from, crudely, the identification of landmark plays and serials that could compete with literature or theatre drama as artistic works, to the adoption of drama as a location for working through theories of ideology and agency, and finally the reflexive construction of histories and examples as formative of each other. Sue Thornham and Tony Purvis's recent book outlines its aims on the first page:

The book outlines key approaches useful in the study of television drama, and explores the ways in which these approaches have been employed in television criticism over the past 30 years. Second, these theoretical and critical approaches are considered in relation to specific case studies... Finally, both television drama texts and the critical perspectives used to explore them are contextualized in terms of the changing identities, histories and discourses which have structured television's drama output and which inform how audiences and critics have read television dramas. (2005: viii)

While different publications negotiate these canonising aims in different ways, and with greater or lesser awareness of their contradictions, publishing about British television drama has become canonical enough to develop meta-historical discourses.

### ACCESS, EXAMPLES AND PEDAGOGY

My brief account of academic books about television drama began with publications appearing in the 1980s, largely because this leads to a further issue that concerns access to programmes and the possibility of working with a stable and accessible object of analysis. Until the early 1980s, and the spread of the domestic video cassette recorder (VCR), there was no ready means for non-professionals to record or play back television programmes. As Helen Wheatley (2005) has explained in a recent essay on *Upstairs Downstairs* (London Weekend TV,

1971–1975), for example, early work on this and other series discussed them as industrial rather than aesthetic objects of study precisely because of a lack of access to the programme for repeat viewing. This meant that studies of television drama had to resort to some combination of four strange procedures to discuss it. To analyse the aesthetics of programmes, by addressing their visual and aural components, narrative form and generic characteristics, it was often necessary to describe shots and sequences in detail. As well as loading down the resulting student essay, article or chapter with lengthy passages of information, the translation of these issues into written language necessarily segues from description to interpretation, and often unconsciously. An alternative to this activity, or a supplement to it, was the occasional use of sequences of still images reproduced in the text, for example in some of the essays in the journal *Screen Education's* special issue (1976) on *The Sweeney* (Euston Films, 1975–1978). Here, too, the activity of selection had to negotiate the problems of representativeness and exceptionalness that I have been discussing in the context of canon formation as a whole, but on the reduced scale of the selection of stills that marked key images, turning points or representative shot compositions. A third procedure was to write or teach about television drama by referring to a written script. The consequence of this choice was that it pushed the subject towards dramas that had acquired sufficient profile or valuation to be selected by publishers as a plausibly commercial venture. So David Mercer's publication of collected television plays (1967) or the script of Jeremy Sandford's *Cathy Come Home* (BBC, 1967) found a place in critical writing and television teaching partly by default, because they were available, or because they had been pre-selected as significant by the gatekeepers of the print medium. This reinforced the focus of analysis on the authorial contribution of the writer, rather as writing and teaching about theatre drama as literature (as opposed to performance) tended to do. The final alternative for publishing and pedagogy in the field of television drama studies was to follow the theoretical and methodological directions of cultural, sociological or institutional approaches, which addressed issues such as the representations of gender, violence or social class, and the role of television as a product of and negotiation with the ideologies of media culture. This pedagogical approach drew more commonly on generic serial and series drama than the authored play, leading, for example, to the important collections of essays produced by the BFI, such as the volume on *Coronation Street* (Granada TV, 1960–) (Dyer et al., 1981).

With the arrival of videotape for recording current programmes, and subsequently the retail sale of videotapes of a small selection of earlier programmes, the emphases of the field were transformed. Until this moment it was necessary, for example, to agree with a group of students that they would all watch the same programme as preparation for a class, assuming that all of them had access to a television set in a hall of residence, shared house or a university building open to them after normal working hours. It should also be briefly noted that a very small number of television dramas could be hired on 16mm film from the BFI,

and when videotape became common this library of holdings began to include taped copies of programmes that could be sent by courier for screening and then returned the next day. When television was taught in university departments that also taught film, these arrangements could be assimilated relatively easily, since the requisite administration, technical support, equipment and hire budget already existed. But the BFI's catalogue of available copies, *Films on Offer*, held many fewer examples of television drama than cinema films, and in itself constituted an informal and unsystematic canon of programmes. The situation is now somewhat different because of the legacy of programmes recorded on university staff's VCRs over the last 20 years. Access problems are now much more confined to programmes that have not been repeated in broadcast form since then, are lost or were not preserved by their makers, or have not been released in commercial videotape or DVD form.<sup>2</sup> This still leaves the problem that academic researchers are sometimes able to access programmes for specialist study (in the BFI's National Film and Television Archive, for example) that cannot be copied, distributed or screened for educational use. The very broadening of the range of recorded and retail-distributed television of the past has two unfortunate consequences: that the desire to see the reduced but still enormous variety of inaccessible programmes becomes greater as access becomes less of a restriction; and that the separation between a research canon and teachable canon persists despite the redrawing of its boundaries.

As well as this problem of access to programme examples, the issue of citing the classics of television drama is shaped by the subject's canonised learning outcomes, among which the skills of close analysis, knowledge of historical and cultural contexts that programmes illuminate and to which they belong, and programmes' relationships with discourses of critical theory are key components. A very large number of students study television in British higher education (HE), whether as a free-standing subject or as part of a course on media, communications or cultural studies at undergraduate level, with yet more students taking A levels at school or in further education (FE). Almost all universities teach courses on which academic books about television history could be used as course texts. There are about 500 institutions in the United Kingdom offering media courses of all kinds, awarding about 250 honours degrees with the word 'media' in their title. Of these, nearly 60 offer named modules in television studies. Books that suit this market have very large potential sales in Britain and are occasionally relevant to similarly large markets in the United States and Australia, where there are shared traditions of television teaching and research, and some shared experience of programming because of the international distribution and co-production of television drama. In comparison with the amount of material available in film studies, the field of writing in television studies is still relatively limited, and thus a small number of texts have become staple in university library collections. It was a selection from this corpus that was discussed above in relation to its activities of selection and canonisation. In further education there are about 200

British institutions that offer courses as part of Advanced GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualification), A level or BTEC (Business and Technology Education Council) studies and use television course texts. Television studies as a subject forms about a half of the work covered in media courses at school AS level, and more than a half at A2. While practical courses are significant at this level, the syllabus requires practical work to address the issues and debates in critical modules, so there is also relevance for critical textbooks in the practical components of courses, though the importance of television history to courses that aim to teach the skills and creative thinking required in television production varies greatly. Introductory books that bridge the teaching of professional competencies and critical methodologies are, understandably, concerned largely with the present and the immediate future (e.g. Bignell and Orlebar, 2005). The emphases in much current research in the field on textual analysis and institutional contexts match closely the divisions of topic and methodology adopted in FE and HE qualifications. Tutors at all levels recommend some of the books discussed above as further reading to more advanced students, and may use copyright-cleared extracts from them in some class teaching. It would seem, therefore, that the canon of television drama and the history of television are of widespread interest.

Books dealing with television drama in a historically informed way are not likely to be required reading at FE level or the first year of undergraduate degree courses, however, because their intellectual level and specific focus on television histories are thought to be too specialised by publishers aiming, for economic reasons, at volume sales.<sup>3</sup> Instead, course texts surveying critical approaches and discussing a wide range of genres, usually with a strongly contemporary rather than historical focus, are increasingly used to introduce the study of television. Since the majority of students using books as part of courses are likely to be between 17 and 25 years of age, a desire to engage their own experience of the programme examples discussed means that these examples tend to be chosen from the decade preceding the book's publication. When discussing histories of television drama, and thus implicitly constructing its canon, older programmes tend to be those that have been discussed before, thus reinforcing canonicity by summarising, questioning or developing what are considered to be key insights by earlier academics. Interacting with this is a tendency to discuss examples that are likely to have been collected or made available for retail, or are being repeated because of their continuing popularity. Keith Selby and Ron Cowderly's *How to Study Television* (1995), for instance, uses case studies of the contemporary continuing soap *Neighbours* (Grundy TV, 1985–) and the readily available and canonised *Fawlty Towers* (BBC, 1975–1979), among others. My own contribution in this area (Bignell, 2004) attempts to signal television history and the process of canonisation as a topic for discussion by devoting a chapter to the issue, but is also constrained by its function and market to occupy itself mainly with programmes of the last decade.

Because of this context, the opportunities for specialised work on the histories of television drama, and the histories of its criticism and theorisation, are rather limited. In seeking to introduce new emphases and topics of study into the field, academic writers are required to engage with the current orthodoxy even if they seek to argue against it. The major differences between courses of study are in their focus on one or two of the following areas: the analytical study of television programmes as texts, the television industry as institution and its production practices and organisation, television in contemporary culture and the sociological study of audiences, and television history and developments in broadcasting policy. So, when setting up 'The Television Series' of academic books with Manchester University Press in 2000, fellow series editor Sarah Cardwell and I sought to demonstrate how the books we intended to commission would connect with but differ from the existing traditions in pedagogy and research. The central aim of the series is to provide clear, comprehensive analysis of the work of key screenwriters, directors and producers for British television.<sup>4</sup> Each volume outlines the body of work of a single creative figure (or a long-established team), provides a critical study of his or her significant work, and foregrounds original sources such as interviews and archival historiography. The tensions between discourses that I outlined above in relation to publication in the field persist here, since each volume has to negotiate its own balance between authorship, programme examples, institutional contexts, and the legacies of criticism and theory of television. The Series is itself an instance of the negotiation between programme examples and narrative histories of television drama, with the added inflection of the placement of programmes in the professional career of their creator, thus linking life history to television history. The tension between agency and the structures of genre, institution and cultural contexts reappears in the self-conscious return to authorship via the critical discourses of recent pedagogy, in which programmes function as the ground through which cultural theories and theories of television are explored.

The risk of the Series is that the viability of any individual volume depends largely on whether it can demonstrate its subject's connection with programme examples that are either already canonical or can be argued into the canon, and the publication of some volumes as paperbacks and some only as hardbacks has been driven by the publisher's estimation of market appeal in these terms. The canon has partial stability and identity inasmuch as it is a locus of pedagogical activity, and as a result of that it works as a key definer of the market for commercial publication. In summer 2005 the BFI was preparing to launch its 'TV Classics' series, running in parallel with its existing series on cinema, 'Film Classics' and 'Modern Classics'. Market research for the new series involved questionnaires that exactly reproduced the tensions in the economy of television publication that I have been outlining. They requested suggestions for programmes to be the subject of series volumes, offering a long list of programmes to choose from. The list covered drama much more than other forms, and named series and

serial titles rather than anthologies or single plays, for example. Key questions for the publisher included whether such books could be used as required course reading for students, whether programmes were important as representatives of a larger critical issue or historical moment, and whether the availability of video or DVD recordings should constrain the choice of programmes to be written about. The initiation of such new ventures is certainly to be welcomed, though the interdependent political economies of research, teaching, publishing and access continue to take their established forms.

### STEPPING TO ONE SIDE

This final section considers how the citation of classics might be sidestepped, but the paradox of the kind of work discussed here is, of course, that its effect might be to shift the boundaries of the canon such that the television histories it reworks or discovers will themselves become canonical. Nevertheless, the cases outlined here attempt to forestall this iterative problem while necessarily succumbing to it in some respects. The first case is the research project ‘Cultures of British Television Drama 1960–1982’, devised by Stephen Lacey and me, to which this chapter and this book are contributions (see the acknowledgement below). The outline of the project attempted to avoid specifying any programmes at all as objects of analysis, a move designed to sidestep issues of canonicity at the same time as providing new ways of conceptualising them. The project addressed British television drama as a culture rather than a canon of programmes, consisting of television institutions and their cultures as they were constituted by the people working in them and in turn affecting those people. Sidestepping ‘serious’ drama, the project addressed popular drama forms and especially those that had not been highlighted in previous academic histories, such as fantasy and horror drama, comedy and science fiction. Rather than the predominantly national focus of studies of television drama as public service broadcasting, the project investigated regionality in television production and representation. The meta-theoretical reflections on selection, canonicity and exemplarity were at stake in the project’s address to popular drama genres and how distinctions between the forms of popular British television drama and canonised flagship drama were dependent on institutional forces and conflicts within and between television institutions, including the regional organisation of production, changes in policy and regulation, and the quotidian detail of production practices. The project worked on how a canonical body of texts and received histories have been established in studies of British television drama, evaluating this process and questioning its methodologies, theoretical assumptions and exclusions, as this chapter has done.

Because it was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council the project did not have to be tailored solely to the demands of the pedagogical economy

described above, and many of its results were directed to academic journals rather than commercial publications. This relative freedom was constrained by three factors, however. First, the design of the project had to appeal to the expert constituency of evaluators from within British academia, and therefore demonstrate both originality and connection to the existing strands of research outlined in the first section of this chapter. Second, the results of the research were published in academic journals aimed at a similar constituency and thus with similar constraints, and also in some commercial publications subject to the market restrictions outlined in the second section of this chapter. Third, the achievability of the project within a three-year time span required the adoption of a relatively limited focus, and therefore only a limited contribution could be made to the potentially huge research issues described above. In each of these ways, the project worked to supplement, in a deconstructive sense, the canons of programmes and publication. It added to those canons, but also redirected them, refracted them or displaced them.

Similar difficulties attend studies that address the absence of developed work on television institutions' production practices, and especially those of Britain's commercial broadcasters. Problems of access to archives, the less frequent or systematic rebroadcast of drama programmes in comparison to the BBC, and the sheer complexity of writing the history of networking arrangements have made writing about them more difficult. Nevertheless, the 50th anniversary of ITV's start-up in 1955 has led to greater interest in its history and the recognition of a market for studies of its output. Some recent publications, such as Cathy Johnson and Rob Turnock's collection of essays (2005), match the agenda for multifocal approaches to television history that I think are now required, and the explicit problems of historiography posed by addressing ITV as an institution, programme producer and cultural phenomenon can be interestingly handled in relation to drama. For example, television scholars have been quick to contribute much-needed work on ITV in the supposed 'golden age' of about 1955 to 1975 to redress the emphasis on BBC output in almost all the books discussed in the first section of this chapter. One productive response to a lack of access to production archives in ITV companies is to make links with the television industry professionals whose recollection of working in television drama can correct, or at least modify, some of the preconceptions that have been accepted in earlier studies.<sup>5</sup>

For example, it is easy to import into historical studies of ITV drama the contemporary preconception that audience ratings and the maximisation of audiences for financial gain and competitive advantage vis-à-vis the BBC were motivating forces for the producers of programmes. While this was the case with serials and series in which a format could be altered during a long run of production (as with *The Avengers* (ABC TV, 1961–1969)), one of the producers of *Armchair Theatre* (ABC TV/Thames, 1956–1973), Leonard White, remarked: 'The only two people I ever used to get any feeling from, or any sort of response in relation

to whether they liked it or didn't was when I got trapped in the barber's chair... when I would hear chapter and verse, and I couldn't remove myself of course, and the person that fuelled my car whenever I used to have to go in the line-up in the garage to get some petrol.<sup>16</sup> As Wheatley (2004) has shown, *Armchair Theatre* had a highly organised production system whereby writers and producers were grouped into teams, and as well as the canonised 'kitchen sink' dramas featuring working-class characters and everyday subjects there was a preponderance of work that contrasts with this, such as generic thrillers, mystery stories or comedies. On the one hand, this suggests that the canonisation of the former kind of drama, exemplified in academic work by 'Lena, O My Lena' (ABC, 1960), has omitted to understand *Armchair Theatre* plays as products as well as texts, and collectively produced texts rather than parts of an author's oeuvre. On the other hand, however, it suggests that the acceptance in earlier studies that there was a division between 'serious' and 'popular' drama in the production culture of ITV is wrong, not because 'serious' drama was also a product but because 'popular' drama was taken just as seriously (Wheatley, 2004, 2007). Canonicity, citation and exemplarity in existing work on television drama have neglected relationships between 'serious' and 'popular' generic television drama, which should be studied interdependently as part of a single television culture.

Despite the presence of work that historicises the conception of the popular as a relational construct developing alongside shifting conceptions of quality (Bignell and Lacey, 2005), studies of popular television drama that address the histories of aesthetic forms have been restricted to analyses of programmes in genres and forms that allow for the rediscovery of unconventional expressive techniques rather than the historicisation of relatively conventional ones. Even so, different kinds of canonisation of science fiction and fantasy programmes occur in relation to the different readerships for recent work, and there is an increasing tendency to address mixed readerships, with consequent mixed effects on the vigour of television scholarship. There is a long tradition of British science fiction production going back to the beginnings of television broadcasting, but monographs and edited collections on British science fiction programmes are few. John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado's (1983) study of *Doctor Who* (BBC, 1963–1989) pursued a similar agenda around agency, ideology and textual analysis to Tulloch's 1990 book discussed in the first section of this chapter, but was also widely read by enthusiasts of the programme. In recent years, academic writers' strategy of addressing a mixed readership of academics, students and fans with work on science fiction drama has been remarkably successful. Some examples include books by Toby Miller (1997), Chris Gregory (1997), James Chapman (2002) and Jonathan Bignell and Andrew O'Day (2004). Work on science fiction drama has thus sidestepped to some extent the economic restrictions on commercial academic publishing for a student readership outlined in the second section of this chapter, and thus re-inflected the canon inasmuch as it is constituted by the programmes that become the subjects of academic studies. This matches the

argument, made above, that the distinctions between ‘serious’ drama and generic popular forms are artificially created by the processes of historiography and canonisation, and parallels the deconstruction of that opposition in the deconstruction of the opposition between categories of reader.

Opportunities for new historiographical scholarship on television drama in the field of television science fiction and fantasy seem likely to emerge as a result of this happy conjunction between different readerships and the different agendas of television historians and television enthusiasts. For example, there is as yet no book on the science fiction anthology *Out of This World* (ABC, 1962), produced by Leonard White between seasons one and two of *The Avengers* in 1962, though recently a volume on *Out of the Unknown* (Ward, 2004) joined the many detailed studies produced by television enthusiasts on television science fiction and fantasy drama. The first episode of *Out of This World*, ‘Dumb Waiter’ (1962), was produced for *Armchair Theatre*, but ABC’s head of drama, Sydney Newman, had the play transferred to begin the anthology series instead. The series was created by Irene Shubik, the chief story editor for ABC Television, was introduced by the 75-year-old Boris Karloff and consisted of adaptations of stories by writers such as Isaac Asimov, Philip K. Dick and John Wyndham. Some of its productions were aesthetically experimental, designed, for example, by the immigrant avant-garde designer Voytek. These little-known and inaccessible dramas offer opportunities to consider the development of science fiction as a television genre, the relations between high-profile drama anthologies such as *Armchair Theatre* and these generic programmes, and the role of visual aesthetics for studio drama (see Wheatley, 2004) that have been unrecognised as forms of experimentation within popular forms. Histories of British television will be unable to sidestep completely the citation of the classics and the negotiation of relationships with existing canons, but there are many interesting opportunities to bring historiographic narratives, programme examples, production cultures, generic relationships and readerships for new work into productive and deconstructive conjunctions.

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