The paradox of distinction: British television series in their golden age

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What Makes British TV Series British?
3. Relational Britishness

The Paradox of Distinction: British Television Series in their Golden Age

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Abstracts

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De nombreuses séries télévisées britanniques à succès de l'« Âge d'or » des années 1960 imitaient l'esthétique et les méthodes de production américaines, notamment les séries réalisées pour le réseau Independent Television. Le style et la qualité typiquement britanniques rendaient les exportations de séries télévisées britanniques attractives pour les chaînes américaines, mais cet attrait reposait, paradoxalement, sur la création de formes hybrides transatlantiques plutôt que sur des formes spécifiquement britanniques. Les technologies de production des séries filmées en Grande-Bretagne étaient calquées sur celles des studios américains. De nombreuses séries britanniques mettaient en scène des acteurs américains, ou étaient écrites, réalisées ou produites par des émigrés américains. Si la singularité britannique était une stratégie de différenciation efficace, elle ne rendait pas compte des influences et des échanges transnationaux.

Many successful British TV series of the 1960s "Golden Age" imitated US aesthetics and production methods, especially filmed television made for the Independent Television network. Distinctively British stylishness and quality made British TV exports attractive to US TV networks, but this attractiveness was, paradoxically, dependent on creating transatlantic hybrid forms rather than uniquely British ones. Production facilities and technologies for making filmed television in Britain were modelled on US studios. Many British series featured US actors, or were written, directed or produced by American émigrés. British distinctiveness was a successful strategy of differentiation, but it concealed transnational influence and exchange.

Index terms

Mots-clés : années 1960, drame, États-Unis, exportation, fiction, importation, Royaume-Uni, série, télévision, transatlantique
Keywords: 1960s, drama, USA, export, fiction, import, Britain, series, television, transatlantic

Full text

1 Britishness in television fiction has been addressed by studies of representation and iconography, characterising it by a social realist aesthetic deriving from the conventions of news and current affairs programmes, the importance of authorship in drama, and an engagement with the literary novel through adaptation or period settings.[1] Rarely has Britishness been investigated by asking how the infrastructures of production, distribution and programme trading have determined how such versions of Britishness reach their audiences. This article begins by briefly outlining how British television drama was made in the post-Second World War period until the later 1950s. This culture of production is contrasted with the other internationally dominant Anglophone television industry of the USA and its different production and distribution methods. In its early development British television was distinct from American television. The main body of the article goes on to analyse how, subsequently, decisive changes occurring in the late 1950s and through the 1960s changed the ways that British and US television drama were distinguished from each other. There were convergences between British and American television cultures in the technologies used to make programmes, the extent and significance of transatlantic import and export of programmes, and the strength of public service ideologies underpinning Britain's televisual landscape. Attention to these factors lends nuance to approaches that simplify Britishness by finding the national specificity of British TV drama primarily in representation, in the images of Britain in exportable heritage culture in costume drama and historical period pieces, or the 'mod' or 'pop' playfulness of 1960s action series like *The Avengers*, *The Persuaders!* or *The Protectors*.[2] These programmes and genres are interesting and important in themselves, but so too is the matrix that enabled them and from which they derived. That infrastructure is the focus of this analysis, and it was a hybrid that increasingly integrated components deriving from the USA.

2 Methodologically, the article adopts several intersecting frameworks of study, because its starting assumption is that Britishness in television drama is a result of several interacting factors, which together produce the impression of national distinctiveness. The article addresses the material impacts of choices of production technology, such as the significance of shooting on electronic video versus celluloid film, or of shooting in a purpose-built TV studio versus on location. It considers how the decisions made by institutions responsible for programme making, primarily national and regional networks and privately owned production companies, underlay the different characteristics of national broadcasting in the UK and USA. Over time, trading between these institutions encouraged the growth of certain programme forms that could be sold either internally between institutions within one nation and/or overseas. Television drama took on an increasingly transnational character in the 1960s, and the article notes the contributions of some key individuals who moved between the British and American television industries. In each aspect of this analysis, the article shows how television production in the two countries began by being relatively distinct, then entered a sustained period of influence and interchange that continues today. This historical picture is complex and multi-faceted and requires the multi-modal approach taken in this article. The main significance of changes in television drama in the 1950s to the end of the 1960s can be determined by looking at various kinds of convergence, interchange, dialogue and exchange. The effects of this are not only to reduce the differences between Britishness and Americanness in television drama, but more interestingly, to draw attention to the paradoxical ways that some kinds of apparent Britishness in fact derived from the integration of American methods, personnel or modes of organisation into the British television landscape.

Distinctions between British and US TV Drama

3 The Britishness of British television production derives from the material conditions of programme making such as the capabilities of the technologies being used, and also from the ideological frameworks that determine how programme makers see themselves and their audiences. These factors change over time, and the period of formative change focused on here is the so-called Golden Age that saw competition between broadcasting institutions, technical developments in shooting and watching television, and the growth of programme trading between Britain and the USA. The Golden Age occurred over the two decades following the launch of the UK's second TV channel, Independent Television (ITV) in 1955, with highpoints in the 1960s as BBC's second channel, BBC2, launched in 1964 and colour began on the main channels in 1969.[3] Britishness changed when a formerly monopolistic national television culture fragmented into multichannel broadcasting and when imports and exports of programmes made relationships of similarity and difference from other television cultures an important terrain for debate. This article argues that Britishness becomes increasingly relational, defined by otherness rather than self-sufficiency, and that Britishness was in any case impure, a hybrid in which external influences were already crucial to its identity.

4 There was only one TV broadcaster in Britain, the BBC, until ITV began in 1955. The BBC's production facilities, and those of ITV in its early years, were based on live programme making for instantaneous transmission. From its launch in 1936, BBC's television service had state-of-the-art studios with several electronic cameras that would shoot carefully rehearsed drama performances for immediate broadcast.[4] It was possible to insert brief pre-filmed sequences into these studio-shot dramas, but television was considered a medium of live performance (like radio). Contracts signed with performers, musicians and writers specified that programmes would not be repeated numerous times, because this would threaten their prospects of future employment, and there was no expectation of programmes being preserved and stored.[5] When videotape recording became generally available (having been launched in the USA in 1956) it nevertheless remained conventional at the BBC to shoot in long tranches of continuous performance on multiple cameras, rather than filming segments of action and editing them together. Professional quality videotape was expensive, as were the machines that could record onto it and play it out for transmission. The assembly editing of video sequences together was very cumbersome, so it was preferable to shoot in long takes "as-if live," to avoid any post-production editing, and to immediately re-use the tape after broadcast to make another programme. So videotaped programmes were rarely available for export; tape was a way of making production more efficient rather than a means of exchanging programmes with other countries.

5 These technical and production conditions had aesthetic consequences that made British TV drama look different from US drama. Electronic video cameras were very difficult to operate in exterior settings, because they were heavy, mounted on wheeled pedestals that could only be moved on a perfectly flat surface, and their power source and image signals were carried on thick cables connected to specialist electronic circuits and switching equipment. The cameras also needed strong light to register clear pictures. British drama programmes were therefore shot in TV studios, not on location, and represented interior settings like household rooms, offices or hospital wards. The capabilities of these production facilities favoured naturalistic dramas in which characters talked to each other in their houses, rather than setting the action in expressive exterior landscapes or tracking actors moving around in street scenes. There were no zoom lenses on electronic studio cameras until the late 1960s, and cameras could only change lenses, and thus depth of field, by rotating the lenses mounted on a turret on the front. Changes of lens therefore had to be done out of vision. Camera movement within the studio required careful planning in order to prevent revealing

another camera in shot, shooting the off-set area by mistake, or leaving a camera out of position for a forthcoming shot. The shots offered by the three or four cameras operating in the TV studio in any one scene were relatively fixed, so dynamism was created by cutting between the cameras, from one point of view to another, or by slowly moving cameras towards or away from the actors. Shooting British television dramas was a complex choreography of bulky studio cameras, performers and overhead microphones, giving a sense of immediacy and intimacy to the viewing experience as it all happened in real time, but it required great skill to accomplish.[6] The constraints of space, setting and the emphasis on dialogue were not so different from theatre performance, and British dramas were often adapted from theatre plays and used actors with extensive theatre experience, while original drama for television was commissioned from theatre dramatists many of whom had also written for speech radio. British TV drama developed its own visual style, arising from its material means of production.

6 For a short time from the late 1940s to the late 1950s, the look of British and US TV drama was similar. In its own brief "Golden Age," US television drama shared some of the "as-if live" aesthetic of British television, when the US networks' most prestigious and high-budget programmes were the one-off television plays broadcast in anthology series sponsored by big corporations, such as *Kraft Television Theatre* on NBC, the same network's *Philco/Goodyear Television Playhouse* or CBS's *Westinghouse Studio One*, funded by producers of convenience food, car tyres and domestic appliances, respectively. These series drew on producers, writers and performers from theatre, with production and personnel mainly located in New York. But in the late 1950s in the USA, filmed television drama made in Hollywood supplanted the theatrical aesthetic, adopting the segmented shooting and editing together of separate film sequences as in the production of cinema.[7] Production planning was based on US seasons of 26 episodes for transmission in three three-month tranches of weekly slots across a year, with repeats in the three months of summer. National US networks aimed to make at least 75 episodes of a series so that these could be sold as packages for repeating by regional broadcasters serving local audiences (the practice of syndication). The production schedule for making multiple episodes of US filmed television required a stable team of production staff (directors, designers and camera operators, for example), based at the Hollywood studios of the big corporations like MGM, Universal or 20th Century Fox.[8] The interior soundstages and backlot sets constructed in Hollywood were not only well-equipped technically but embedded in the studios' factory-like cinema production culture. Television series were sponsored by corporations making national mass-market consumer goods and groceries, like General Foods, Colgate-Palmolive or Ford cars. The primary audience was the US household, whose attention the TV networks aimed to deliver to the sponsors of the networks' programmes. American TV drama became a large-scale industry making large numbers of similar programmes, driven by commercial imperatives.

7 The combination of sponsorship, advertising spots and syndication income meant US programmes were expected to recoup their costs within the US, with overseas sales a potential source of extra profit. Because of the several different time zones across the USA, television stations expected to broadcast at different times and the distributors of programmes expected to physically transport them to the TV stations in different parts of the country on reels of celluloid film. It was not much more difficult to transport filmed television abroad, where the technology for showing 35 mm cinema film was standardised internationally. The technical and institutional arrangements in US television made export of US series relatively easy and profitable, whereas British videotaped programmes would have to be either converted to the USA's video broadcast format or transferred to celluloid cinema film that could be physically transported across the Atlantic. British television pictures were made up of 405 lines of electronically encoded visual information, whereas US programmes were transmitted as 525 lines; the technologies were not compatible. Making US programmes in the medium of 35 mm cinema film gave the US an advantage since that technology was

common in Hollywood already, where most TV programmes were made, but it was not widely used across British TV production and especially not at the BBC with its studio-based drama culture. British distinctiveness came at a cost.

8 Ideologically, the broadcasting cultures of the UK and USA were fundamentally different, Britain's being based on concepts of public service and the USA's on commercial franchises. In Britain the BBC's broadcasting system comprised a network of regional transmitters, all broadcasting the same national schedule (but with some timeslots for regionally created programmes such as local news). The concept of TV as a medium for creating a shared national culture, and reflecting the nation to itself, was enshrined in the BBC's Charter from government, awarded in 1926 for radio and then covering television too. The BBC was funded by an annual fee paid by owners of radio or TV sets, resulting in a fixed but reliable stream of income. Income from this licence fee paid for programme making, implicitly requiring BBC television to appeal to and serve the perceived interests of a domestic British audience. The BBC had an extensive infrastructure of studios and production staff, making almost all its programmes in-house. Developing a brand identity overseas for the BBC or for British programmes, and developing a market for them, were not significant in the creation of the institutional structures of British TV nor in the forms and formats of programmes. Both BBC and ITV television were required by the terms of their licences to broadcast mainly British programmes, and to "inform, educate and entertain" the British public.[9]

9 The public service function required of both BBC and ITV meant they shared the aim to draw social classes and regions together by showing how other Britons live. In British television drama in the 1960s, the different forms of the single play, serial and series were a key terrain for negotiating the meanings of public institutions and the extent of liberal consensus. Drama programmes featured education institutions, medical institutions and the police. These programmes offered ways of debating questions of social responsibility through dramatic tensions between institution and individual, professionalism and "common sense," and between workplace cultures and the communities those workplaces aimed to serve. British television drama engaged with inherited conceptions of society and social responsibility, as well as newly emergent, resistant, and reformist ones. Single television plays representing contemporary life and addressing social challenges and debates, were a significant means to do this, and although mainly shot in the TV studio, portable 16 mm news film cameras were sometimes used to show realist, usually urban settings with immediacy and authenticity. In the first full year of production for the BBC's *Wednesday Play* series (which ran from 1964-70), for example, 33 new plays specifically for television were presented, written by 27 writers.[10] The 1965 year included plays on controversial subject matter. *Fable* addressed apartheid and immigration, *Horror of Darkness* was about homosexuality, *Three Clear Sundays* addressed capital punishment and *Up the Junction* was about abortion. The best-known *Wednesday Play* is *Cathy Come Home*. On its first showing, on 16 November 1966, it gained an audience of ten million and is the most frequently repeated television play. In contrast to studio-shot drama whose conventions derived from the theatre, its BBC producer Tony Garnett and director Ken Loach adopted the apparent untidiness and immediacy of documentary to show the protagonist's arrival in London to the formation of her family. The greater part of the play concerns the family's slide into homelessness, the break-up of the marriage and the inability of welfare services to provide for their needs. These dramas' political approach aligned with Britain's New Left socialist movement, and their scheduling between the main news broadcast and a late-evening discussion programme made them widely viewed and controversial.[11]

10 Such specifically British cultural factors meant that programme export was difficult and unusual, in addition to the technical issues mentioned above. Moreover, the US networks colluded to establish a television culture that made it very hard for overseas programmes to find a market. The networks followed a strategy of vertical integration, purchasing the film studios where programmes were made, so that by 1964, they had ownership of or had acquired rights in 93 percent of all prime-time programmes that

they showed.[12] Because they attract the largest audiences, prime-time programmes were the most valuable for attracting advertisers, and the networks also controlled their distribution. They owned about 200 television stations in major cities, each filling about 60 percent of their broadcast time with network-originated programmes.[13] The competition between US networks led to the production of rival programmes based on similar formats, as each network vied for audience share. The CBS network was locked in competition with NBC for ratings dominance throughout the decade, with CBS generally leading by virtue of its genre-based series like the rural comedy *Beverly Hillbillies* and the Western drama series *Gunsmoke*. In evening programming aimed at the family audience, there was a rash of sitcoms including *The Addams Family* and *Bewitched* that centred on "weird" or alien characters set incongruously in a conventional suburban milieu. There was a crop of science fiction blended with other genres, such as *The Time Tunnel* that mixed a sci-fi premise with stories set in historical periods. In this environment, imports of British series could offer a distinctive way to compete on already-crowded genre territory. There was an opportunity for British television to offer something different, if it could enter the US market.

11 American television had contradictory qualities for the British: it was regarded as exciting and modern but also tawdry and brash.[14] This view also affected perceptions of other cultural products such as jeans, rock-and-roll records and comics.[15] US consumer capitalism was associated with energy, progress, and entrepreneurialism, but also acquisitiveness and the replacement of British imperial power by a new order of American hegemony. In 1960 the British government commissioned the Pilkington Report that evaluated ITV's programmes and identified a worryingly low level of quality that it blamed on excessive dependence on US imports and the imitation of US formats.[16] This was a widespread view; the London *Evening Standard* newspaper commented on 30 April 1960, for example, that ITV was a "dull routine of cowboys, crime, murders, pop singers and half-wit quiz games," condemning programme genres associated with the USA.[17] These caricatures of US television lent force to an assumption that commercial ITV television was itself a "foreign" consumer medium and would therefore undermine the family, encourage audience passivity, smuggle American values into British broadcasting, and displace an organic working-class culture. The immediate success of the ITV commercial channel on Britain from 1955 onwards provided ready examples for these pessimistic arguments. In 1956-57, BBC television was available for reception in over 96 percent of Britain's 15 million homes; initially the new ITV only reached 1 million homes but by 1960 its coverage had spread to 9.75 million homes,[18] as people bought TV sets that could tune into its broadcasts. Viewers preferred the new ITV channel to BBC, in a ratio of 60:40.[19] There was a real challenge to the BBC, leading to discourses about ITV's threat to Britishness because of apparent Americanisation.

12 Both British and US regulators and reformers referred often to each other's broadcasting cultures when considering how to promote and control television (as they had previously done in radio).[20] But they referred to the other nation as an example of what not to do, more than as something to imitate. This was demonstrated clearly when BBC contemplated the introduction of colour broadcasting. For cultural commentators and BBC executives, there were concerns about the tastefulness of colour TV, which was tainted by an association with Hollywood and the uneven aesthetic and technical quality of US colour television programmes. Colour broadcasting had begun in the USA in 1954, but the market was slow to develop.[21] The three major TV networks invested in colour production facilities and sought to drive sales of colour sets by making programmes that exploited colour in their visual aesthetics. By 1965 all three US networks transmitted in colour and it became the key battleground for competition between them. The new BBC colour offering, launched in 1967 on the minority channel BBC2, strove to be more tasteful. For BBC2's Controller, David Attenborough, it was a "valuable discipline" to avoid being "drunk with the thrills" of colour, distancing the BBC from when the US networks "swamped their dramas with gaudy period costumes" in colour transmissions in the USA.[22] However, even shooting in colour in BBC's

electronic studios increased production costs significantly, and shooting on colour film was even more expensive, making imported US colour dramas an attractive alternative, potentially diluting the implicitly tasteful Britishness of the BBC's schedules.

Convergences between British and US TV Drama

13 The concern with Americanisation in television was an expression of broader concerns about processes of modernization and globalisation, in which the USA had overtaken Britain as the leading industrialised power. Within Britain, as hierarchy and consensus waned after the Second World War and perceptions of fragmentation and alienation were expressed in concepts such as delinquency, Americanisation was a terrain for discussing the problems of integrating new popular and commercial cultures, especially those of young people. ITV was funded by selling advertising time to businesses, as American television was, so ITV was automatically associated with Americanisation as the Pilkington Report had shown. But there were also opportunities for ITV that BBC did not have. The national ITV network comprised a patchwork of regional companies holding franchises to broadcast in a specific area of the country. ITV companies covering major cities and the wealthier South-East and Midlands areas of England were the most profitable. The regional ITV companies made programmes themselves and sold programmes to each other and to the network. There were incentives, therefore, for them to reduce costs by buying imports or buying other ITV companies' programmes, and to make programmes that they knew they could sell to the rest of the ITV network or overseas. Making programmes on film meant much greater cost per hour than as-if live studio shooting but gave the opportunity to repeat and sell the resulting programme to another regional ITV channel or for export. The first Managing Director of the ITV company ABC noted in his memoir that the cost of broadcasting rights for a US filmed drama episode was about £2,000 in 1962, versus the cost of making one hour of live studio drama at £4,500, and the cost of making a one-hour filmed TV episode at £10,000.[23] It made economic sense either to import US programmes, or to make filmed drama that could be sold either within the UK to other ITV stations or to the USA. The wealthier of the ITV companies gradually became major producers of filmed programmes for sale in the UK and USA. The distinctiveness of ITV's dramas became, paradoxically, their transatlantic transportability.

14 When British commercial television began in 1955, both BBC and ITV were limited to showing about 14 percent imported programmes.[24] As the Pilkington Report had shown, American entertainment and drama were popular with British audiences, although BBC and ITV scheduled US imports differently. The BBC tended to schedule more US programmes at weekends, mainly music entertainment series or adventure drama. ITV placed US drama in evening primetime across the week, as part of its claim to be exciting and distinctive from the BBC. The BBC began to see its viewers as a market as well as a public and formed its Audience Research department in 1950 to make decisions about which programmes to make and renew in response to the growing numbers of households able to receive ITV. The BBC introduced new popular genres that imitated ITV's imitations of US formats including quiz shows, variety programmes and soap operas.[25] As broadcasting hours increased during the 1960s and daytime programming slots had to be filled, American drama began to appear in the early evening as well as in prime time.[26] The lower cost per episode for an acquired US series than the cost of making their own programmes led ITV, in particular, to schedule US fantasy series such as *Lost in Space*, *Nanny and the Professor* and *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* for the mixed child and family audiences of the 5.00 – 7.00 pm period. Once colour was launched in Britain on the main channels BBC1 and ITV in 1969, it was US imports like these that enabled British channels to feature colour significantly in their schedules, in genres such as the Western, crime drama and sitcom.

Fantasy and science fiction series like *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* and *Lost in Space* were particularly opportune vehicles for colour because of their exotic settings and action-adventure storylines. Both BBC and ITV used popular US series to address young audiences' concerns, such as technological futures and Cold War conflict (sometimes at the same time, as in BBC's acquisition of *Star Trek* which was screened each year in the UK from 1969-81). In Britain, US programmes were associated with youth and exuberance, each of which could signify in positive or negative ways.

15 In Britain, the ITV companies began to make filmed programmes that could appeal to the US market by cleaving to US formats and genres, but being British gave them sufficient distinctiveness to compete with US made programmes. The television mogul Lew Grade ran the London commercial ITV franchise Associated Television (ATV) and also the programme-maker ITC (Incorporated Television Company).[27] Grade made programmes for ATV and for supply to the national ITV network but also sold programmes to the US and other overseas markets.[28] *The Adventures of Robin Hood* was on ITV and also sold to the CBS network in the USA in 1955. Weekly tales of derring-do in an historical setting characterised the Western series imported from the USA (the cowboys the Pilkington Report complained about), and British historical adventure series about outlaws, pirates and colonial adventurers offered the same kinds of pleasures to both British and US viewers. ITC followed up with further historical adventure series, *The Buccaneers*, screened on ITV and sold to CBS in 1956, and *The Adventures of Sir Lancelot*, sold to the US network NBC in 1957. Shrewdly, in 1966 ITC began making its filmed dramas in colour several years before colour programmes were available on ITV in Britain, so that they could be sold to US networks for the American colour schedules. Iconic British figures like Robin Hood had become transatlantic successes.

16 The increase in production of filmed drama for television led independent producers or ITV broadcasters to buy or lease large film studio complexes, mainly located in the London suburbs. For example, ITC acquired Elstree Studios in 1961.[29] A downturn in the British cinema filmmaking industry made these studio sites relatively cheap.[30] Like Hollywood studios, these complexes had backlot buildings and streets that could be dressed to represent various places, so that programmes could appear to be shot in exciting foreign locations.[31] Export successes enabled Grade and his fellow producers to lobby government for deregulation to reduce costs, aligning the British filmed television industry with Hollywood practices. Unionisation was common across the British television industry, but laxer rules, allowing short-term contracts of employment and freelancing, were allowed in the cinema industry because of its project-by-project financing. Claiming that their studios were making "films," Grade and other filmed television producers could evade union regulations that made production more expensive.

17 ITC sold the spy thriller *Danger Man* to CBS in 1961 (retitled *Secret Agent*), and it was awarded "Best Produced TV Program" of 1965 by the Screen Producers Guild in the USA.[32] The marketability and brand identity of Britain's exported series were dependent on conventional narrative forms and genres, like the spy adventure series or the detective series, that were familiar to US as well as UK audiences. A problem or mystery is introduced at the start, often in a pre-credit sequence, and it is investigated and resolved. Ideologies of law and order are upheld by the protagonists and the institutions for which they usually work, restoring social equilibrium. Storylines are fitted into the US and commercial UK television hour or half-hour (approximately 48 minutes and 26 minutes respectively) that are segmented by commercials. Programmes' visual style and genre identity are marked early on by distinctive opening music in a relatively lengthy title sequence to establish a brand identity. These strategies were also adopted for ITC's *The Saint* which began production in 1962, starring Roger Moore as a sophisticated international adventurer, based loosely on Leslie Charteris's novels but with a tone, characterisation and settings that closely resembled the currently popular James Bond character (who first appeared in a cinema film in *Dr. No* in the same year). The heroic masculinity exhibited by Bond and his successors was an upper-class

English blend of taste, wit, charm, luxury consumerism and sexual prowess, with globetrotting exoticism provided by inserted stock footage of foreign locations.[33] *The Saint* continued to be made until 1969, with sales to US television, and ITC developed other spy adventure series in hour-long film series for the rest of the decade and beyond.[34] British series with adventurer protagonists drew on the international success of Bond, especially in the USA, to craft series designed to appeal to American perceptions of Britishness, more accurately Englishness.[35]

18 The pivot of British adventure drama towards the American market, and the confusions between the Britishness or Americanness of such 1960s series, is clear in ABC's *The Avengers*. It began as an espionage thriller and became increasingly science-fictional, with fantasy storylines involving robots, miniaturisation and brainwashing. *The Avengers* was the third highest-rated programme in Britain in 1967, with a budget of £30,000 per episode, with storylines tailored to US network requirements before being shot.[36] The central duo of a man (played by Patrick Macnee) and a woman (Honor Blackman, followed by Diana Rigg then Linda Thorson) called upon to solve mysteries, undertake espionage missions and combat master criminals paralleled other action-adventure series but became more performative and ironic, playing up to the "Swinging London" stereotypes created in the USA by *Time* magazine.[37] An ABC Television promotional brochure for series 5, aimed at persuading companies to buy TV commercials that would be placed during the programmes, advertises the new series by drawing attention to its international success and its playful tone: "The success of the former series of THE AVENGERS in over 50 countries—including USA—proved that its popularity was due to its essential Englishness and off-beat humour. Both these elements are preserved to the full in the new series."[38] In ITV's Annual Report for 1967, the network noted that "the 'international' series must, in its attempt to be universally acceptable, lose some of the character of the series produced for the home audience alone; but series like *The Avengers* have shown that it is possible to achieve success overseas without losing the native savour."[39] The national character of the series was seen an ambivalent blend of Britishness and Americanness.

19 Selective co-option of British television culture occurred in the USA. BBC staff had visited the USA, and US network executives had visited the UK, regularly since the establishment of national radio and then television systems in each country.[40] The BBC was the inspiration for US networks' classical music, drama and educational programmes, mandated since 1934 as public service programming on radio and then on television. The association of "quality" with British styles and genres in the US, especially in drama, also facilitated co-productions and the transfer of personnel to the USA. The largest export market for BBC programmes in the "golden age" of British television drama was the British Commonwealth of former colonies and dependencies, especially Canada and Australia,[41] but senior figures stressed the importance of producing programmes in ways that would conform to the structural requirements of US commercial channels. BBC programmes in Britain had no commercials, but opportunities for overseas buyers to include them were signalled during recording by a fade to black for a brief period, with a caption saying "insert your commercial message here" added in post-production. Four commercial breaks per hour were assumed, placed at dramatic turning-points indicated by music. Both BBC and ITV aimed to support rising television production costs by exporting programmes wherever possible. The Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) was the most significant means of presenting British programmes in America, after its foundation in 1968. The PBS schedule showcased these programmes in *Masterpiece Theatre* hosted by the expatriate Briton Alistair Cooke who had worked for many years in transatlantic radio and television broadcasting. In the USA, serial drama had been assumed only to be suitable for daytime scheduling, with filmed episodic series being expected in prime time, but the success of the BBC's 1967 historical drama *The Forsyte Saga* when exported to PBS in 1969 lent respectability to serials with high production values for prime-time broadcast.[42] British costume and literary drama became associated with quality, expressed in its acting, design and measured pacing, and for some US audiences,

Britishness became a signifier of belonging to an elite US demographic possessing high cultural capital expressed by their TV viewing habits.[43]

20 Smaller entrepreneurial American film producers invested in filmed television projects made in Britain, known as "runaway" productions, financed by American money but made in British film studios at low cost. The US producer Hannah Weinstein, for example, arrived in Britain in 1952 and made the police drama *Colonel March of Scotland Yard*, starring Boris Karloff, for US television syndication in 1954-55 and for screening on ITV in Britain in 1955 where realist police procedural drama was becoming established.[44] Weinstein was a pioneer in this area, establishing Official Films, a production company that brought US writers and producers to the UK to make filmed series. Programmes could use American or Canadian actors, as well as British performers, since many American performers, writers and directors came to Britain following US anti-Communist hysteria in the 1950s, and in the 1960s during the Vietnam War.[45] Canadian actors could masquerade as Americans on-screen and did not need work permits because they were Commonwealth citizens. While runaway US series made in Britain were marginal overall, they established the practice of making programmes in one country for broadcast in another, and the creation of a pool of transatlantic television professionals with knowledge of both systems.

21 The influence of US émigrés was also important to what might seem the most British of genres, the one-off original TV play, often in social realist form, representing the nation to itself. Sydney Newman, a Canadian producer who also worked in the US, was recruited to add dynamism to the British ABC company's drama output, produced for the national ITV commercial network.[46] He initiated the critically respected *Armchair Theatre* anthology of original dramas and also the format for the action-adventure series *The Avengers*, thus both prestigious 'theatrical' drama and genre fiction that drew large audiences (and therefore advertising revenue). He was poached by the BBC to become its Head of Drama from 1963, as BBC attempted to shake off its reputation for stuffiness and erode ITV's greater audience share. Newman split BBC drama into three parts: a Plays department to explore contemporary subjects through the anthology series including *The Wednesday Play*, a Series department to create popular long-running dramas in genres like the police and hospital series, and Serials whose drama followed long-term story arcs and encouraged viewer loyalty. Paradoxically, it was this Canadian producer, drawing on knowledge of the US network system, who originated some of the most distinctively British television of the era.[47]

22 Conversely, there were programmes that might seem quintessentially American but that derived from British formats made into American versions. This was especially the case with the half-hour prime-time sitcom, a genre that was key to the US networks' schedules. The popular and long-running US CBS sitcom *All in the Family*, for instance, was based on the British BBC series, *Till Death Us Do Part*, and the BBC's *Steptoe and Son* became NBC's *Sanford and Son*. But these programmes were not presented to US audiences as adaptations of British formats; the US networks marketed them as "new" programmes. The US producer Norman Lear, acclaimed for creating liberal and progressive comedies, based several sitcoms on unacknowledged British formats.[48]

Conclusion: The Paradox of Distinction

23 British distinctiveness can be shown in how programmes were made in the British television industry, before the arrival of ITV in 1955 and before the widespread adoption of recording and distribution technologies in the later 1950s and 1960s. These technical and institutional differences put up structural barriers that forestalled early television exchanges. Moreover, Britishness was also in place as a rhetorical trope, stigmatising overseas influences and approaches to making programmes and to addressing audiences. This article has shown that the reality was more complex, and perceived national differences concealed patterns of transnational influence and exchange. The boundaries between Britishness and Americanness shifted in dynamic

ways, in relation to production, representation and reception. American television's production methods, personnel, and attitudes to the audience were both adopted and resisted in British television culture. In some commercially produced British adventure drama series, US television was a model for British production practices, and programmes made by exiles and émigrés, both behind the camera and also in programmes featuring British and American characters and performers, contributed to a transnational television culture based in the UK. Transatlantic relationships led to relatively successful attempts to sell British programming to US broadcasters; according to Chris Gregory, in 1969 "US stations bought more ITC product than that of any American company except MCA/Universal."[49] The strength of the US domestic television industry has been the foundation of its success in exporting television, but in the 1960s British producers and their programmes were able to penetrate the USA in similar ways to British impact on other cultural sectors such as music, fashion or design. There was overlap between these cultural scenes; the film musical cycle of *The Young Ones*, *Summer Holiday* and *Wonderful Life* featuring pop stars Cliff Richard and The Shadows was shot on the same Elstree studio backlot near London where ITC made many of the TV adventure series mentioned in this article, and with similar emphases on youth, travel and opportunity. Imported US programmes in Britain have often been criticized on the grounds of quality, but some British series were able to reconfigure conventional action-adventure programme formats associated with the USA and sell those narrative forms both to British networks and also back across the Atlantic. British television drama exists in relation to its own national television culture, but it is always also related to American television drama as a structuring 'other' and they mutually define each other's significance. The academic study of television has tended to neglect the permeability of national borders and the interrelationships between TV cultures, or to see them in terms of oppositions of purity and contamination. This article has argued that Britishness is better understood as a shifting term established though dialogue. Anglophone British and American television cultures borrowed from and exchanged with each other, though not always in publicly visible ways, confusing yet also creating the distinctiveness that the idea of Britishness implies.

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