

# *Exploring the casting of British and Irish actors in contemporary US film and television*

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'Exploring the casting of British and Irish actors in contemporary US film and television' for Hogg, C. and Cantrell, T. (eds.). *Exploring television acting*, Bloomsbury.  
Simone Knox

From Josh Bowman, Liam Cunningham, Idris Elba, Marianne Jean-Baptiste, David Harewood, Kit Harington, Lena Heady, Hugh Laurie, Damian Lewis, Andrew Lincoln, Kelly McDonald, Iwan Rheon, David Tennant, to Ed Weeks and Dominic West – the presence of British and Irish actors in contemporary US television drama is certainly noticeable, spanning different genres as well as network, cable and streaming television. Add to this such recent outings on the big screen as by Christian Bale, John Boyega, Kate Beckinsale, Henry Cavill, Daniel Day-Lewis, Andrew Garfield, Tom Holland and David Oyelowo, and it is clear that British and Irish actors have been achieving success in the USA in terms of both breadth and depth, with many securing prominent roles in high-profile productions. This transatlantic success is intriguing and attracting growing attention in press, fan and academic debates (Weissmann 2012: 170-2, Holliday 2015, Becker elsewhere in this book, and Knox and Cassidy forthcoming).

Of course, the US creative industries have long made use of British/European acting and other creative labour. Drawn by Hollywood's stature and glamour, British and Irish actors have been able to exploit their linguistic advantage over their continental competition since the coming of sound. As Babington (2001: 15) has noted in relation to the deployment of British actors in Hollywood:

While Hollywood also desired [continental] European stars, their more obvious difference made them more narrowly deployable and in smaller numbers. French stars could only be French, but British stars might be used in ways that accentuated their Britishness (usually Englishness), as with Herbert Marshall or David Niven, or – as has happened from Cary Grant to Minnie Driver and Gary Oldman, diminished it so that they pass, all, or some of the time, for Americans ....

Part of a long trajectory, the contemporary influx of British and Irish actors in US productions is, like all transnational labour flows, subject to historical contingency, bearing out significant patterns and nuances. Certain patterns in Hollywood's use of foreign labour have already been delineated in the existing literature: focused on directors, Petrie (1985) noted three key periods with a noticeable influx of foreign talent into Hollywood: the 1920s, marked by Hollywood's fear of its European competition; the 1930s/1940s, when political refugees fled from the dangers in Europe; and the 1960s/1970s, when Hollywood was keen to lure talented figures away from revived European cinemas.

The first two of these periods have been understood as key moments for the specific export of British acting talent to the USA: the 1920s and 1930s have received attention by Morley (2006), Russell Taylor (1983) and Street. The latter notes: 'The economic problems of the British film industry in the 1920s made Hollywood an attractive place where many native actors tried their luck on the screen' (2009: 160). Moreover, Glancy (1999) has discussed the Hollywood 'British' Film in the late 1930s and early 1940s, which provided notable employment opportunities for British actors. Considering and developing some of the directions for future research on émigré actors outlined by Polan (2002), this chapter will illuminate some of the significant patterns and nuances for the recent stateside move of British and Irish talent, which needs to be understood as another key historical moment of such acting labour flow.

What distinguishes this present moment within the larger history of British and Irish actors in the USA is that the post-2000 period has seen a significant number of such actors being cast for high-profile roles in major US productions. In these, the actors in question utilize their less obvious difference and broader deployability that Babington (2001) noted, appearing at times in roles that draw on their Britishness/Irishness (e.g. Jonny Lee Miller in

*Elementary* (CBS, 2012-present), Chris O’Dowd in *Bridesmaids* (2011)), but predominantly in roles that mask their origins (see also Holliday 2015). Part of a wider trajectory of ‘unmarked transnationalism’ (Hilmes 2012: 257), these actors do not merely (to recall Babington’s words) pass, all, or some of the time, for Americans, but often play (albeit at times darkly) heroic characters and figures deeply resonant with the US popular imagination. These characters and figures include the doctor (Laurie, Kevin McKidd), cop (West), sheriff (Lincoln), CIA/FBI agent (Harewood, Jean-Baptiste), soldier/marine (Lewis), pastor (Christopher Eccleston) and superhero (Bale, Cavill, Garfield, Holland). They further include celebrated figures from US history, such as Martin Luther King, Jr. (Oyelowo), Abraham Lincoln (Day-Lewis), plus a raft of US presidents in *John Adams* (HBO, 2008) and *Sons of Liberty* (History, 2015). The productions in which these actors play such roles are predominantly concerned with subject matters located within US contexts; quite a difference from the days of the Hollywood ‘British’ Film.

#### A note on methodology and terminology

This chapter will examine the casting of British and Irish actors for US productions from an industrial perspective that is interested in the lived experience of screen culture. Attending to the working environment of these actors on both sides of the Atlantic, I will explore how this casting has been negotiated by an interlinking complex of industry structures, practices and technological developments. Warner rightly points out that casting is important but highly under-researched, with ‘relatively little effort [having been expended by scholars] to penetrate beyond final product to examine the process by which actors come to inhabit ... roles’ (2015: 19). To address this, the chapter will draw on original, in-depth interviews with talent agent Kelly Andrews, Equity official John Barclay, actor Tony Curran and casting director Suzanne Smith.<sup>1</sup>

These four are highly established in their respective fields, possessing transatlantic experience. A partner in Brown, Simcocks & Andrews, Kelly Andrews spent several years at the agency Markham & Froggatt, where she was involved in Lewis' auditioning process for *Band of Brothers* (HBO, 2001). Having worked for the UK trade union for professional performers and creative practitioners since the 1990s, John Barclay is Equity Head of Recorded Media. Trained at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Tony Curran's career includes roles in *Underworld: Evolution* (2006), *Sons of Anarchy* (FX, 2008-2014), *Thor: The Dark World* (2013) and *Defiance* (Syfy, 2013-2015). Receiving Emmy Awards in recognition for *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* (HBO, 2010), Suzanne Smith cast Laurie and Jesse Spencer for *House* (Fox, 2004-2012) and has worked on the UK casting for an extensive list of productions including *Black Hawk Down* (2001), *True Blood* (HBO, 2008-2014) and *Outlander* (Starz, 2014-present). The chapter will combine the insights gleaned from the interviews with archive research conducted at the BFI Reuben Library, building on existing scholarship, which in recent years has shown an emergent interest in European émigré actors in Hollywood (Phillips and Vincendeau 2006), the rise of Hollywood talent agents (Kemper 2010), US television casting practices (Warner 2015) and trade unions such as Equity (e.g. Dean 2010).

Whilst the chapter refers to British and Irish actors, US film/television, etc., the long-standing presence of European talent in Hollywood to some extent calls into question terms indicating distinct national contexts and identities. As Phillips and Vincendeau discuss, given Hollywood's increasing dependence on subcontracted multinational companies, and globalization of plant, location and personnel: 'it has become increasingly difficult to define what a "Hollywood film" actually *is*.' (2006: 4) With the shift to digital platforms and different economic models, such complexity of terminology also applies to what is commonly understood as US and British television.

Moreover, the 'Britishness' of 'British actors' is far from straightforward, fixed and homogenous. Nuances such as those pertaining to regional identities usually get lost in press/fan discourses on foreign acting talent in the USA. These further tend to conflate Britishness and Irishness (subsuming the latter into the former), with the term 'British' often becoming convenient shorthand for Anglophone European actors. This shorthand covers (if not obscures) the considerable fluid (if not liminal) identities of a number of actors; and it is partly through their westward move that the actors of interest to this chapter acquire what Phillips and Vincendeau call "'hyphenated" cultural lives' (2006: 4) that straddle both sides of the Atlantic. Mindful of such complexity, this chapter now proceeds to uncover the patterns and nuances of the contemporary westward move of British and Irish actors.

#### The appeal of US film/television production to British and Irish actors

This move is closely linked to these actors' working environments. Film and television east of the Atlantic have been marked by a simultaneous increase in the competition for roles – particularly since the Employment Act 1990 'neutered what had been [Equity's] defining characteristic, the pre-entry closed shop' (Dean 2010) – and decrease in the number of available productions, in an already smaller home market. With the long-standing struggles of the British and Irish film industries, and the decline of repertory theatre as noted by Rawlins (2012), television has become the main employer for British and Irish actors.

Here, with shrinking funds (partly linked to the shift to different economic models), the rise of light entertainment and reality formats, investment into original drama production has overall declined over recent decades (see Media Legislation Report 2010). What have also declined are overall earnings for actors without the clout to demand higher fees. So, the majority of professional actors in Britain and Ireland have been facing more competition for fewer dramatic roles that on the whole pay less, resulting in economically precarious conditions that concern Equity, as Barclay stresses. This makes it hardly surprising

that these actors, reminiscent of their 1920s' predecessors, would consider moving across the Atlantic, attracted by the high volume of productions in the larger market and the anticipated economic and profile-raising benefits.

Broadly concurrent with the declining employment opportunities in Britain and Ireland has been an increase in Hollywood's gravitational pull with the acclaim that US television has been gathering since the 1990s. As Curran reflects, the prospect of a dramatic role in a 'quality' production, working on a budget and creative scale generally unavailable in the UK, has proven attractive to a good number of British and Irish actors. This prestige and the 'investment into character' in long-form storytelling have also been resolving past hesitations about working for the medium of television. Interestingly, Curran identifies a distinction concerning 'the multiple determinants of television acting' (Pearson 2010: 166), especially time and the collaborative process, between network and non-network shows which have different cultures of production. That the quality reputation of contemporary US drama is, in the case of cable and streaming, linked to a production model involving fewer episodes and more creative risk-taking than the 'well-oiled machine' of network production generally can allow, has only furthered the attraction of a stateside move. Smith has noticed a shift in attitude, an increasing willingness to seek employment in the USA, by (established) British actors, noting that cable and streaming's comparatively shorter production schedules are attractive in terms of career management, as 'it becomes more tempting, viable and easier to manage than with a film career, or a theatre career, or having a family.' Curran agrees with this, further pointing out that concerns about 'potentially signing your life away' when becoming optioned for a network show<sup>2</sup> are off-set by the prospects of regular employment in a profile-raising production, especially for actors from less secure economic backgrounds.

British and Irish actors have also been attracted by the prospect of a more interesting range of roles for which they are being considered in the USA. As they have



auditioned for and secured US roles, this sidesteps established British stereotypes. As Phillips and Vincendeau (2006) and Spicer (2006) have discussed, in its portrayals of British identities, Hollywood has traditionally relied on stereotypes such as the suave gentleman, the interfering manservant, the bumbling fool and the well-spoken villain; with British actors often playing British sidekicks to the US lead. 'The force of such images has meant that actors who wished to escape "their" national typecasting ... found it extremely hard to obtain significant roles' (Phillips and Vincendeau 2006: 13-14). With shifting US industry approaches to employing British and Irish actors, even what Rutger Hauer had described as 'Hollywood's number one rule ...: American actors play heroes, foreign actors play villains' (in *ibid.*: 14) relaxed. Playing US characters, actors like Cavill, Lewis and Lincoln are cast increasingly not only as the leads, but as the (often interestingly flawed) hero. This diversity of dramatic roles on offer is very appealing from an actor's perspective, Curran confirms.<sup>3</sup>

A different type of diversity on offer becomes apparent from the perspective of British and Irish actors who have perceived the casting across the borders of race, ethnicity, class or region to be rare east of the Atlantic. There has been public criticism for a failure to take risks with black casting and a lack of colour-blind casting in Britain in recent years, in which actors such as Harewood, Jean-Baptiste and Morgan Freeman, and director Rufus Norris have been involved. For example, referencing his casting for *Homeland* (Showtime, 2011-present), Harewood has commented: 'It's taken me 26 years and a couple of trips to America to convince people in the UK that I can carry a show and that I can be a leading man' (in Sherwin 2012).<sup>4</sup>

However, a narrow approach to casting has also been perceived when it comes to genre. Several actors who worked in British soap operas before heading to the USA report having felt typecast in Britain. Nathalie Emmanuel, who worked for four years on *Hollyoaks* (Channel 4, 1995-present) and later joined the cast of *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011-present), argues that struggling to find employment is an experience common to actors upon exiting

British soaps: 'People can't see you in any other role. So you just think: why not move to another country?' (in Sampson 2013: 14) Agreeing that 'an actor who has been in a soap in the United Kingdom for a long time will have more difficulty being cast in a versatile way in subsequent work', Andrews notes the efforts by actors (including post-Doctor David Tennant) to circumvent being type-cast: the move abroad is one increasingly taken up option for some actors 'to try and affect some kind of change in their career, to take control back.'

So, auditioning for US productions has been perceived as holding a transformative potential for British and Irish actors. This is not because the US creative industries currently represent some kind of utopian haven of equal employment opportunities, nor because casting directors and agents in the USA are more imaginative than their counterparts east of the Atlantic (see also Warner 2015). British professionals such as Andrews and Smith have been working creatively within and beyond the UK for years. The US screen industry has long been associated with role segregation and stratification, reductive representations and tokenism; and a significant difference is to be drawn between US network and non-network television. Instead, the transformative casting experienced by British and Irish actors in the USA needs to be understood as facilitated by a number of local factors. One of those is their 'blank slate' status overseas: aspects of the actors' identity pertaining to class, regional identity and genre connotations are less apparent or relevant during the process of auditioning in the USA, enabling different kinds of casting choices. (However, this 'blank slate' status is complicated by the fact that, as Becker importantly points out elsewhere in this book, the transatlantic crossover flow is impacted by issues of class, as well as gender.)<sup>5</sup>

#### The appeal of British and Irish actors to US film/television production

Here, the reasons why British and Irish actors are attracted by the prospect of looking for work in the USA merge with the reasons why such actors have proven an attractive

proposition for US film/television production. The actors in question tend to be relatively unknown abroad at the point of casting. This could pose a risk – Andrews rightly stresses, ‘bankability and marketability drives everything’ – but this risk has been managed by recent US productions (e.g. through balancing the presence of unknown actors and marketable names), and casting such unknown actors offers several advantages to US productions.

For example, fan/social media discourses may be more easily managed, as the recent backlash against Ben Affleck as Batman suggests. Casting actors with less exposure to US audiences also works well in relation to the quality status of cable shows being partly constructed around notions of distinction, of being different and fresh. Weissmann (2012: 171) has further identified the strategic use of UK actors by US quality drama in terms of their usable high cultural capital, derived partly from their association with British theatre heritage. Furthermore, the actors’ relative anonymity enhances realism and verisimilitude, which can aid brand building. During the ‘Making It In The States: British Actors and Directors on American TV’ BFI panel on 25 April 2010, producer Andrea Calderwood recalled that *Generation Kill* (HBO, 2008) had actively preferred less known actors, with the intention to aid notions of authenticity and audiences’ ‘identification with an illusory real’ (Caughie 2014: 149), helping to elide the difference between actors and characters.

Of course, when Emmanuel refers to how ‘people can’t see you in any other role’, the ‘people’ refers to not only UK industry personnel, but also British audiences; and casting directors and producers employed for US productions work with the expectation that when American viewers watch, for example, a telefantasy show like *The Walking Dead* (AMC, 2010-present), they are unlikely to be distracted by the thought: ‘Oh, it’s Egg riding a horse in the post-apocalypse!’<sup>6</sup> So, the ostensible gap between the approach to casting for US productions (which has gathered praise for its imaginative choices and perceived risk-taking) and for British projects (which has been criticized as narrow-minded) is narrowed by the fact

that both approaches are driven by analogous assumptions about what their key audience would be likely to (not) accept.

Whilst British and Irish actors can offer 'productive anonymity' (Holliday 2015: 64) to US productions, they are experienced performers, usually (like Curran) with drama school training, and always several years' worth of professional experience behind them. The latter is significant, given that obtaining permission to work in the USA has become somewhat arduous, as Andrews recalls:

Immediately after 9/11, the studios who had been prepared to have their lawyer green-light an O1 visa at the drop of a hat – 'Oh, we'd really like this actor we saw in London for an episode of *24*: rubberstamp it, green-light it, push it through' – all of that stopped because of the change in the security status in the States and the evolution of homeland security. If you could get a visa on your own, you could come to a studio like FOX and work, but you couldn't get a visa endorsed by FOX .... You had to be able to prove that you were already 'known', 'famous' or a 'marquee name' in the UK.

Since 9/11, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services requires foreign actors who apply for a work permit – usually the O1 visa (or EB1 green card) for 'aliens of extraordinary ability' – to provide a file of evidence for a high level of accomplishment in the creative industries. To simplify (and further detail is provided by Becker elsewhere in this book), such evidence ideally includes a resume and showreel showcasing a body of significant work, nomination or receipt of an acclaimed award or prize, and other forms of critical recognition, such as material in the national/international press. That Curran began amassing credits during the 1990s and won a BAFTA Scotland for *Red Road* (2006) have helped his transatlantic career. Smith has witnessed casting decisions get overturned

because of insufficient evidence, noting that ‘recently [she] was doing a pilot for NBC and Amazon, and the girl chosen that they wanted was British, but we couldn’t get her visa because she hadn’t got enough body of work.’

While obtaining the right to work in the USA became more difficult after 9/11, the same time period also saw a shift in US industry attitudes that facilitated the employment of British and Irish actors for US productions. This shift traces back to *Band of Brothers*, the high-profile miniseries that featured an abundance of British and Irish actors, including Jamie Bamber, Michael Fassbender, Dexter Fletcher, Tom Hardy, Matthew Leitch and James McAvoy. Its critical and commercial success, including the award recognition for lead actor Lewis, demonstrated to US industry professionals that such actors could head high-profile productions and convincingly play US characters. Smith confirms this:

[*Band of Brothers*] was a really big thing. I think that when [the production team] started, they did not know what they would find here. They were considerably worried that the British couldn’t do an American accent that would be acceptable: so initially a lot of the actors had to have voice coaching, and it really stemmed from there. After *Band of Brothers* being so successful, it then became everybody, you know .... The agents then *realized*, with the success of that, that it was viable for British actors to get American parts. The American agents then went, ‘Oh, there’s an untapped field’. They want to have another actor that they can market: ‘who’s the next hot one?’ So, very quickly, a lot of those actors got American agents, you know, with British agents *and* American agents.

Given the industrial imperative of risk management, the success of British and Irish actors in *Band of Brothers* was crucially reassuring. Showcasing the talents of these performers, it set a catalysing precedent that helped shift industry perspectives and

practices; a shift that has been productively engaged with by a number of industry professionals. Here, attention is merited to the trajectory of the careers of Smith as well as Nina Gold, two high-profile British casting directors, who, since *Band of Brothers* and *Rome* (HBO, 2005-2007) respectively, have worked extensively across the Atlantic. (Gold has cast for projects including *John Adams*, *Game of Thrones* and *Prometheus* (2012).) *Band of Brothers* paved the way for not only the future international careers of many of its cast, but also, often aided by Smith and Gold, further high-profile showcases for British and Irish acting talent, such as *House*, *Rome* and *Game of Thrones*.

Post-*Band of Brothers*, experienced actors such as Lewis or Lincoln have been more readily regarded by US producers as capable of carrying a production and coping with the demands of US filming schedules. Emphasizing that Lewis had already ‘reached a level of profile here before that happened’, Andrews notes:

And it is the debate that you will find that agents have with their actors all the time, younger actors, actors who haven’t broken through here, yet saying to you: ‘I want to go to LA and try it out, because there’s so many British people in LA now.’ And you go: ‘Yeah, but Damian Lewis didn’t go to LA until he was *already* Damian Lewis *here*’.

Not only did Lewis have a track record, but, Andrews points out, this included a role with direct resonance:

Particularly helpful in that case was the fact that he had been in a Peter Kosminsky drama called *Warriors*. So when the agency at Markham & Froggatt was able to send [the recording of Lewis’ first audition for the role of Winters], they also sent a tape of *Warriors*, because it was the right *sort* of tape to send. So, there’s a bit of Damian

doing *Warriors* and there's a bit of Damian doing [*Band of Brothers*], and that's what went forward first.

Aided by his existing body of work, Lewis' achievement was continued by subsequent actors, most notably Laurie, whose prior experience of drama *and* comedy, Smith emphasizes, was important for his casting in the role of House. In a somewhat self-perpetuating movement, these successes provided reassurance for US producers that British and Irish actors have the ability to deliver successful performances in high-volume, pressured productions.

Laurie is an interesting example of transatlantic acting success as he problematizes certain assumptions about British actors: he has been praised for his performance of and accent for House, yet neither is the result of vocational British actor training.<sup>7</sup> British and Irish actors have long been held in high regard in the USA (and elsewhere), because of the cultural capital of British and Irish theatre and the prestige accorded to drama schools such as The Lir, RADA and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. The value of this training is upheld by Andrews, Barclay, Curran and Smith; and press discourses on the contemporary success of such actors in the USA contain numerous references to the rigorous training they have received, equipping them with technique and discipline.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, this training is cited in contemporary discourses as reasons for their success in the USA, when the same training has been evoked in the traditional view that British actors are more suited for the stage and US actors for screen-based work (see Zucker 1995). This binary view, based on dominant understandings of acting traditions on both sides of the Atlantic, is certainly being challenged by the recent success of British and Irish actors in the USA, whether they attended drama school or not.

Returning to the relative anonymity of British and Irish actors at their point of casting for US productions, this aids not only transformative casting decisions and creative

concerns, but also commercial imperatives. Actors considering a westward move are likely to be driven by the anticipated economic benefits and taking note of success stories such as Laurie's exceptional salary for portraying House (which made him one of the highest-paid actors in television history), as Smith has noticed. However, trained and experienced as they are, these actors have little leverage for negotiating salaries at their initial entry point in the US market. Moreover, whilst their immigration status in some ways facilitates their casting in lead roles (as visas are tied to 'extraordinary ability'), it may also delimit their leverage for salary negotiations in the medium-term.<sup>9</sup> As a consequence, they are paid considerably less than their US counterparts, even on the same production and for roles of comparable size and importance. According to an unnamed industry executive, in 2007 it was becoming increasingly difficult to cast a US actor in a lead role for a television drama with a salary of less than \$100,000 per episode, and British actors generally work for considerably less (Carter 2007: E1). As James Purefoy pithily put it during the 2010 BFI panel session: 'We are often referred to in LA as white Mexicans'. With increasing pressures on budgets, British and Irish actors have been proving attractive, cost-effective propositions for US film/television producers.

As Curran notes, these US salaries are, of course, nevertheless attractive, as are the opportunities for a profile boost and the chance of being cast in a production that could turn into a major film franchise or long-running show. Here, the prospect of obtaining not only potentially continuous employment, but also bargaining power for contract re-negotiations are important considerations, especially given the precarious working life of the vast majority of professional actors in the UK and Ireland (and elsewhere). As a specific example, that Laurie's salary for *House* began 'in the mid-five figures' (Andreeva 2008: 1), increased to \$250,000-\$300,000 per episode in 2006 and then again to roughly \$400,000 per episode in 2008, would have been of interest to his professional peers.



### Continuity and change: the lived experience of contemporary transatlantic screen culture

As the chapter reflects, the seeking/securing of employment by actors closely involves a number of 'off-screen' industry professionals. Their labour is usually neglected (if not erased) in discourses on the contemporary success of British and Irish actors in the USA, and on acting and actors more generally. And yet, the perspective of such 'unseen talent' stands to productively inform those discourses and 'give new insights into otherwise opaque industrial processes.' (Banks et al. 2016: xi) For example, one well-known story circulating in press/fan discourses is that Laurie was hired on the spot by Bryan Singer for *House* after he sent in his audition tape (filmed in the bathroom of his Namibian hotel). Laurie's US accent was so convincing that Singer, who had stopped considering British actors, praised Laurie as an example of the kind of US actor he had been searching for. Here, Smith's involvement paints a different picture.

Smith recalls that Laurie's agent Christian Hodell loved the *House* script and Laurie's wife took the script and a camera when visiting her husband, and the resultant recording was sent to the USA via the Fox carrier pouch. On arrival, a delay was caused by the difference between the British and US video standards: 'I communicated with the American casting director, asking "why haven't you viewed it? Why haven't you viewed it?" And she said, "we can't view it", and it had been sitting there for a couple of days, and they couldn't transfer it from PAL to NTSC. Christian [Hodell] then managed to find somebody to transfer it.' Once this technical issue was resolved, Laurie's casting proved still not instantaneous. As Smith explains, the production:

took a risk, because [Laurie's] American accent wasn't that brilliant; but they didn't give him the job from that, they waited until he'd finished the filming [in Namibia] and then he went to America and auditioned in front of them so it wasn't 'tape =

yes'. It was 'tape...oh great, he's really interesting. Worried that his accent is [not quite there]'

Here, Smith's testimony demonstrates how practitioner discourse may not 'legitimate long-standing tightly held industrial mythologies' (Caldwell 2008: 318), but work to precisely challenge what she calls 'lovely myths'.

As Smith's testimony furthermore vividly reflects, casting directors and talent agents, as well as the actors whose employment they facilitate, are located within a complex lived experience of screen culture. Here, it is crucial to recognize that the present historical moment is embedded within an industrial culture marked by continuity and change. Much of what Tom Kemper argued in his work on the rise of Hollywood agents from the late 1920s to the 1940s still applies to the present, especially his following point: 'Crucial to my argument here is my conception of Hollywood as a business world embedded within a *social network* (and vice versa). This may not be big news, but it adds an important perspective to understanding the business, which, in the case of agents, cannot be extracted from the *social culture* in which it is rooted.' (2010: ix-x; emphases added) With the enduring centrality of professional contacts, the work of Andrews, Barclay and Smith hinges around cultivating relationships, exchanging information and managing a range of continually evolving parameters within and across groups of multiple stakeholders.

Actors are, of course, equally located within these social cultures, which become only more densely populated for those who move abroad. There they, under the US model, acquire not only a local agent, but also a manager and eventually a lawyer, PR consultant and stylist. Andrews explains, 'in the States, the manager has maybe, on average, 20 or 25 clients. The agent has a lot more, and it's the manager's job to drive the agent hard for that specific client.' With such a multi-faceted model, British and Irish actors find themselves paying commission to a larger number of professionals than they were accustomed to: for

Curran, this involves the agency Domain Talent and manager Tammy Rosen. Recent initiatives such as the establishment of a West Coast branch of Equity and the organization Brits in LA aim to offer to such actors local advice and support. This includes guidance concerning the different cultures and processes of casting, such as the importance of network casting approval and the particularities of the television pilot season (a ‘challenging and stressful time of the year’, Curran notes), as well as accommodation, transport, etc.

Since the period Kemper explored, the industrial framework within which the transatlantic careers of actors unfold has become increasingly complex, following rounds of mergers, takeovers, expansions, buy-outs and start-ups. In the case of talent agencies, the ‘big four’ – WME (William Morris Endeavour), CAA (Creative Artists Agency), ICM Partners (International Creative Management Partners) and UTA (United Talent Agency) – became ‘capitalised as global corporations’ (Burrows 2006: 454) with multi-national offices that invariably include London. They operate alongside smaller/newer competitors in Britain (e.g. United Agents and Troika) and the USA (e.g. Domain Talent), whose physical infrastructures, though not working practices, are local in scale. There are noteworthy connections and collaborations between these competitors, which mean that Curran, for example, is represented by both his long-term British agency, Scott Marshall Partners, and Domain Talent. Barclay notes that in such strategic alliances: ‘the agent in America will put forward in America some UK talent of the agents that they’re linked with in London. ... So that’s how they access each other’s territory and each other’s clients. I’m sure that there must be things like split commissions.’

What may further accompany such strategic alliances is an industry practice with much longevity, namely package deals. For example, it is no coincidence that *Games of Thrones*’ Gethin Anthony, David Bradley, Natalie Dormer, Emun Elliott, Joel Fry, Kit Harington, Sam Mackay and Tony Way (the list continues) are represented by the same agency, United Agents. As Kemper (2010) has discussed in relation to the studio era, package

deals that attach a number of actors to a project can help reduce the labour and time of seeking out talent for producers and casting directors, and agencies may gain more leverage for negotiations on behalf of their clients.

Following a trajectory of preceding strategic investments, most notably perhaps the establishment by then-leading agent Myron Selznick of a London office for his US agency in 1933 (Kemper 2010), this complex transatlantic framework facilitates the movement of British and Irish actors to the USA. It does so in that it allows for both a pool of strong local knowledge *and* trans-national networks, whereby agents, managers, casting directors, etc., (as appropriate to their remit) establish and cultivate relationships with one another, as well as with actors. This aids with the scouting of talent, securing of employment, negotiating of contracts and setting up of deals.

Perhaps the single biggest development marking this framework, certainly in terms of the impact on the everyday working practices of the on- and off-screen professionals involved, concerns the ascendancy of digital/mobile technology. The use of the internet/email, smartphones, laptops/tablets, videoconferencing/Skype and cloud storage services facilitates the casting of foreign actors, as it speeds up the complex decision-making process (crucial in pressured working schedules), reducing labour and costs. Smith elaborates:

I remember when we were putting actors on video tape, and then it became DVDs, and you were sending those physically: I remember rushing down to FedEx, having to get there for 17.15 pm before it closed, with your VHS tape or later on with your DVD, making sure it got to America, and it then would take 48 hours to get there. And then with [online casting service] Cast It, you could actually put it up, and they have it instantly.

More recently, UK performer directory Spotlight has begun offering the Actor on Tape recording service, specifically set up so that actors who have secured an audition in the USA do not need to travel there. Producing a professionally produced, high-resolution file that is then uploaded, Spotlight promotes the service as allowing actors the opportunity to seek employment abroad without disruption for their (pursuit of) work in Britain. As Smith and Andrews confirm, this kind of service can help reduce the arduousness of getting cast for US productions – Matthew Rhys’ stateside success followed trips to the USA for numerous pilot seasons – certainly in the early stages of the individual auditioning process.

### Conclusion

Spicer argued in 2006 that British actors’ ‘extensive contribution to contemporary Hollywood deserves to be more widely recognised than it is.’ (146) This recognition has been a slow process, but efforts in recent years, such as the 2013 ‘Exploring British Film and Television Stardom’ conference at Queen Mary University of London and the associated issue of the *Journal of British Cinema and Television* (Spicer and Williams 2015), offer hope that this process is gaining traction. This chapter contributes to such efforts by having examined the recent wave of British and Irish actors in US film and television, which needs to be understood as a key historical moment within the long trajectory of transatlantic acting/creative labour flow.

Historicizing the contemporary, the chapter has highlighted some of the significant patterns and nuances of this historically contingent moment, in which – following the catalysing precedent set by *Band of Brothers*, and intertwined with changing legislative frameworks, increasing industrial globalization and the rise of digital technology – industry practices have been increasingly moving to assist the casting of such actors for US productions. Here, the shift in mindset by industry personnel in the USA and UK, as identified by Smith, has been paramount, and led to the development of closer transatlantic

working relationships. Such a shift in perspective and practices has seen British and Irish actors find unprecedented success in the USA. Given the ephemeral nature of the social culture of the creative industries, further shifts in perspective and practice seem likely.

Having illuminated some of the ways in which acting is embedded within a complex web of wider contexts and practices, this chapter argues for the importance of paying more sustained attention to the work of unseen, off-screen professionals such as casting directors, talent agents, and union officials, who, individually and collectively, make a formative contribution to the creative industries. Weaving together interview testimony by Andrews, Barclay, Curran and Smith, each of which displays considerable industrial reflexivity (Caldwell 2008), the chapter has offered an insight into the lived experience of British and US screen culture by some of the individuals that populate it. It has positioned the work of actors in their professional contexts and explored the impact that off-screen professionals have on their work. All of these individuals constitute increasingly global players whose professional careers are embedded in an industrial landscape marked by continuity and change. Using broader brushstrokes at times due to its size, the chapter has made space for ostensibly minor details – such as the recollection of a casting director rushing to a courier service before close of business – because such texture concerning *process* is so ephemeral and yet so impactful to the *products* on screen.

Insisting on the importance of unseen, off-screen professionals is not to argue that less attention should be paid to the work of actors, nor is it intended to inappropriately negate actors' agency. On the contrary, closer engagement with the work of the former allows a better understanding of the contexts, working practices and professional relationships within which actors, acting and actors' agency operate, simultaneously facilitated and dependent. With a burgeoning interest in acting within television studies, which has a strong tradition of paying close attention to industrial contexts, there is now an opportunity to steer the wider scholarship on acting and performance to pay more attention

to the professional relationships, processes and cultures within which acting and actors are located, including those concerning pre-production. Through its use of interviews pertaining to the interlocking perspectives of the actor, agent, casting director and union official, this chapter hopes to have offered a route which further research in this area can productively use.

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<sup>1</sup> Subsequent quotes are taken from personal interviews with Smith on 12 September 2014, Andrews on 9 December 2014, Barclay on 28 August 2015 and Curran on 6 May 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Such contracts are somewhat reminiscent of those from the Hollywood studio system in that they place commitment unilaterally upon the actor.

<sup>3</sup> So, although British and Irish actors may come to represent a homogenised Britishness, the range of roles open in this more general guise in the USA is noticeably wide.

<sup>4</sup> These concerns have been highlighted in recent campaigning led by Equity, Lenny Henry and Act for Change.

<sup>5</sup> Moreover, increasing attention is being paid within current press, scholarly and political discourses to the foundational role privilege can play in the working lives of professional actors within the British context. For example, the current Labour shadow government has launched an inquiry titled 'Acting Up – Breaking the Class Ceiling in the Performing Arts'. See also Friedman, O'Brien and Laurison (2016).

<sup>6</sup> US screen products have a long history of employing foreign actors to gain access to overseas markets, and Lincoln's casting offers an additional point of interest for the desirable British export market.

<sup>7</sup> As Rawlins (2012) argues, Laurie can be understood as an exception that proves the rule.

<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere in this book, Becker explores the discursive framing within such press articles.

<sup>9</sup> I thank Christine Becker for bringing to my attention that the immigration status of foreign actors in the USA is usually tied to their employment, which can impact their ability to depart early or hold out for a higher seasonal raise once they have signed a standard contract for a series.