# Ken Russell: British critical reception and the construction of an authorial reputation

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Ask you ordinary, 'man-in-the-street' cinemagoer if he can name a motion picture director and he'll almost certainly come up with one of two names. Alfred Hitchcock […] will probably be one. And the other, almost certainly will be Ken Russell.[1]

[1] Brian Doyle, 'Ken Russell… A Man of Our Times', *Savage Messiah* Press Release (1972), BFI press clippings.

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## 1. Introduction: Ken Russell, British critical reception and the construction of an authorial reputation

The British filmmaker Ken Russell (1927-2011) is a contentious figure. During the 1960s, Russell was considered to be a significant contributor to television arts programming. At the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Russell established a reputation as a talented writer-director of television biographies about artists and composers. For example, *Elgar: Portrait of a Composer* (BBC Television, 11 November 1962) and *A Song of Summer* (BBC One, 15 September 1968) were received as considerable artistic and technical achievements.[2] At the beginning of the 1970s, Russell became increasingly critically divisive. As Russell crossed over from television into film, with such films as *Women in Love* (Ken Russell, 1969), *The Devils* (Ken Russell, 1971) and *Tommy* (Ken Russell, 1975), he was considered to undermine his talent through authorial self-indulgence and excess. Furthermore, a sustained period of controversy and negative critical reception, combined with a flamboyant public persona, resulted in Russell being written into film history as 'The *Enfant Terrible* of British Cinema'.

As Russell's career progressed, negative critical assessments contributed to a narrative of career and reputational decline - particularly following the film biographies *Lisztomania* (Ken Russell, 1975) and *Valentino* (Ken Russell, 1977). In such discourses, Russell's authorial reputation for self-indulgent excess and corresponding flamboyant public persona were considered to both overshadow and obscure his authorial talent. Here, a common assessment in British film criticism is provided by the film critic (and later filmmaker) Gavin Millar: a "passion to shock has too often led [Russell] into a territory which is an uncomfortable blend of liberation and suppression, has tended to blunt and coarsen his extraordinary visual talent."[3] Furthermore, the film scholar Roy Armes identified that by the late 1970s: Russell had become a "victim of the extravagant public persona which he has created for himself."[4]

[2] Regarding the in-text referencing of film and television programme titles. The initial reference in each individual chapter will be a full title. Therefore, a main title and where applicable, a subtitle. Subsequent references will only refer to the main title. Additionally, the first reference to *Song of Summer* in each chapter uses its original broadcast title: *A Song of Summer*. Subsequent references within that chapter will refer to its re-titled name: *Song of Summer*.

[3] Gavin Millar, 'Films: A passion to shock', *The Listener* (24 June 1982), 32.

[4] Roy Armes, *A Critical History of British Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 306.

Moreover, negative assessments of Russell have been influential in how he has been written into British film history. For example, Alexander Walker, the film critic for *The Evening Standard*, stated that Russell's temperament toward excess rode "roughshod over his talent" and that he was "a master of the *kulturkampf,* the psychodrama of the artist's soul, the porno-biography which is not quite pornography but is far from being biography."[5] Similarly, the *Movie* critic and academic Robin Wood asserted Russell's films "constitute a sort of cultural pornography, both degraded and degrading."[6] Therefore, Russell's was contested as a British filmmaker and therefore considered difficult to recuperate into British film history at the time of his death in 2011. A special issue of the *Journal of British Cinema and Television* concluded that Russell's reputation had declined to such a point that by the end of his career he was regarded as a meretricious filmmaker whose films were of a "low cultural value."[7]

This thesis is titled 'Ken Russell: British critical reception and the construction of an authorial reputation' and its purpose is to examine the institutional and critical establishment, construction and development of Russell's authorial reputation as a film and television director. Therefore, I further aim to intervene in the historical study of British film and television and interrogate their conceptualisation: specifically, the shifting boundaries of critical taste, standards, and values and their relationships to the historical-cultural meaning of individual films and their authors. Here, I will argue in this thesis that developments in British film and television criticism are central to the establishment, construction and development of Russell's specific authorial reputation, and the establishment and maintenance of Russell's public persona – particularly, the shift from traditional to niche film criticism and legitimisation of cult taste in critical discourse, the foregrounding of the film director in British film culture and debates around cultural permissiveness.

In examining the development of Ken Russell's reputation and persona, this thesis will propose that Russell is a contradictory figure within British film and television history. Therefore, I also aim within this thesis to interrogate prevailing assumptions about Russell as an *enfant terrible*; a soubriquet that the film scholar Matthew Melia has stated has become a "journalistic

[5] Alexander Walker, *Hollywood England: The British Film Industry in the 1960s* (London: Michael Joseph, 1974), 389.
[6] Robin Wood, 'Ken Russell', in *Cinema: A Critical Dictionary* (Roud, ed.) (London: Secker & Warburg, 1980), 909.
[7] John Hill, Christophe Van Eecke, and Karel Vanhaesebrouck, 'Introduction', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* (12:4) (2015), 434.

shorthand for dismissing both the man and his work."[8] Primarily, the assumption that he suffered critical opprobrium because his excesses did not adhere to established critical standards of realism and restraint. Furthermore, I will also consider the central role of cultural institutions, such as the British Film Institute (BFI) and the BBC, in establishing and constructing Russell's authorial reputation. Here, I would argue that romanticising Russell as an outsider figure has come to obscure the relationship between institutional status and critical reputation.

Russell is significant in British film history because taste, both authorial and critical, and sustained controversy are central to the construction and development of his authorial reputation. Furthermore, Russell is significant because of his divisiveness as a filmmaker and the visibility of his public persona in British film and television culture. Therefore, I will examine in this thesis several reputational constructions and developments. Primarily, Russell's artistic reputation as an amateur filmmaker and television director, Russell's popular reputation and public persona as film director, and his later cult reputation; especially as institutional and critical constructions.

Broadly, Russell developed both an artistic reputation and a contrasting popular reputation during the 1950s and 1960s. As an amateur filmmaker during the 1950s, he established a reputation as an exceptional talent with the short film *Amelia and the Angel* (Ken Russell, 1958). This reputation facilitated Russell to crossover into professional filmmaking at the BBC. At the BBC, Russell developed both an institutional and critical reputation of being an artist or, more precisely, the 'television-director-as-artist'. Russell's artistic reputation was established on his contribution to television arts programming with the authored documentary and the dramatisation of documentary on television. Here, Russell was considered to push medium, institutional and representational boundaries with a series of impressionistic biographies about artists and classical composers, particularly following *The Debussy Film: Impressions of the French Composer* (BBC One, 18 May 1965).

During the 1960s, Russell also developed a popular reputation as the 'Wild Man of the BBC'. As the decade progressed, Russell's interpretative approach to biography became increasingly

[8] Matthew Melia, 'Introduction', in *ReFocus: The Films of Ken Russell* (Melia, ed.) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 3.

critically divisive and he was considered to be moving toward becoming a wayward talent. Here, some critics considered the dramatic representation in Russell's television biographies to be increasingly partial, excessive and overwrought. Consequently, as I will show, Russell became increasingly associated with cultural permissiveness in the popular press. Furthermore, Russell began to cultivate a public persona following the release of *Billion Dollar Brain* (Ken Russell, 1968) – the third instalment of the popular Harry Palmer series starring Michael Caine in the lead as Len Deighton's eponymous anti-Bond – to distinguish himself from other television directors crossing-over into film.

At the beginning of the 1970s, Russell achieved critical and commercial success with his adaptation of the D. H. Lawrence novel, *Women in Love*. Following the reception of *Dance of the Seven Veils* (BBC One, 15 February 1970) and *The Devils*, Russell's critical reputation and public persona then became fixed as an *enfant terrible*. For clarity, *The Oxford English Dictionary* states that *enfant terrible* borrows from the French for 'terrible child' and is defined as "a person who compromises his or her associates or his or her party by unorthodox or ill-considered speech or behaviour; loosely, one who acts unconventionally."[9] In accordance, Russell was considered to undermine his artistic reputation through authorial self-indulgence, inappropriate excess and a deliberate intention to shock. Furthermore, the flamboyance and contrarianism that developed as part of his public persona reinforced critical divisiveness.

Regarding critical reception, the critical success of Russell's television biographies and his subsequent reputation as an *enfant terrible* established critical expectations for which Russell was evaluated against for the rest of his career. A significant example is found in Dilys Powell's, the film critic for *The Sunday Times*, review of *The Boy Friend* (Ken Russell, 1971). In the review, Powell concluded that Russell's talent is "destructive" because "what was indulgent becomes grotesque" and while "the talent is there all right […] it is an appalling talent."[10] Subsequently, an 'appalling talent' becomes a label attached to Russell alongside *enfant terrible*. Alongside taste, central themes in the critical reception of Russell during the 1960s and 1970s include: authorial talent, artistic responsibility, and permissibility. Here, a central critical issue is the appropriate approach, style and tone for serious adaptation and subject-matter.

[9] Oxford English Dictionary, *Enfant Terrible, n.* (Oxford University Press, September 2023), Oxford English Dictionary, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/7456695237.
[10] Dilys Powell, 'Films: Guying the dolls: *The Boy Friend*', *The Sunday Times* (6 February 1971), BFI press clippings.

From the late-1970s, Russell was considered to enter reputational decline. As Russell's career progressed and opportunities became more precarious, he increasingly foregrounded his public persona as *enfant terrible*. Subsequently, Russell was evaluated against this persona. As *enfant terrible*, Russell was considered to have reached the point of self-parody. Here, Russell was considered unable to reproduce the romantic quality of his earlier television biographies. His inability to mature resulted in him being taken less seriously. Alternatively, Russell developed a cult reputation. From the mid-1980s, a new generation of fans and critics re-appraised his reputation as *enfant terrible* and rehabilitated him as a 'cult *auteur'*. Primarily through *The Devils*, these fans and critics romanticised Russell's association with controversy, censorship and negative critical reception.

The aim of this introduction is to contextualise the thesis through a literature review, establish an informed methodological approach and outline its overall structure. Furthermore, the aim of each these sections are to refine the thesis argument in relation to the British film and television criticism and reputational development of Ken Russell. And to clarify, this thesis is not a biography of Russell. Rather, the circulation and repetition of biographical information is understood to contribute to the construction of authorial reputation.

## 1.1. Literature Review

The aim of this literature review is to provide an overview of the development and relationship between British film criticism and British film studies, and the conceptualisation of British cinema and the discourse of realism, and British film authorship. Specifically, the conceptualisation and institutionalisation of traditional film criticism, the development of cinephile criticism and *auteurism*,[11] the establishment of British film studies and the legitimisation of British cinema, and development of niche criticism and its relationship to cult taste. Here, a central theme is cultural legitimisation and the broadening of critical taste,

[11] Throughout this thesis, British cinephile criticism refers to the broader critical developments prompted by the critics at the periodical *Movie* that led to the popularisation of *auteurism* in mainstream film journalism. This broad definition includes film critics such as Raymond Durgnat and other non-traditional film critics who were resistant to the development of structuralist film theory.

standards and values. Furthermore, this literature review will also examine these issues in relation to the established scholarship about Ken Russell. British television criticism will be discussed in the methodology.

Andrew Higson has proposed that a national cinema – that is, the circulation and consumption of films within a national culture – is a discursive construction informed by the reproduction of historical-cultural narratives, traditions and themes, and institutionalised critical taste, standards and values.[12] From the late 1960s, the institutionalisation of film studies has been central to the legitimisation of British cinema.[13] John Hill identified the legitimisation of British cinema required the institutionalisation of film studies into the academy, through criteria such as the director-as-author, and then the establishment of British film studies.[14] Furthermore, Hill identified its legitimisation has been characterised by classification struggle and canon construction; a process where critical taste and hierarchies of aesthetic values have supplanted one another.[15] Especially, distinct traditions of realism and fantasy and, to a lesser extent, romanticism and modernism.[16]

Alan Lovell noted that with the development of British film studies, British cinema has shifted from an 'unknown' to a 'known' cinema.[17] Therefore, British cinema can be considered as a discursive construction. Here, journalistic film criticism had a central role in the construction of film histories. Regarding scholarship and its influence on criticism, British cinema has been defined through the reproduction of the critical assumptions of earlier writers, and the repetition of hierarchical binaries and metaphors.[18] For example, Higson identified that critical discourse

[12] Andrew Higson, 'Critical Theory and "British Cinema"', *Screen* (24:4) (July 1983), 80–95; Andrew Higson, 'The Concept of National Cinema', *Screen* (30:4) (October 1989), 36–47.

[13] Since the mid-1980s, influential edited collections about British cinema have been published. Significantly, the BFI's *The Cinema Book* (Cook, ed., 1985) and *The British Cinema Book* (Murphy, ed., 1997), *All Our Yesterdays* (Barr, ed., 1986) and following Charles Barr, collections associated with the Film Department at the University of East Anglia (UEA): *Dissolving Views* (Higson, ed., 1996), and *British Cinema, Past and Present* (Ashby and Higson, eds., 2000). More recent collections represent the move towards historicism and include: *The Routledge Companion to British Cinema History* (Hunter, Porter and Smith, eds., 2017) and *A Companion to British and Irish Cinema* (Hill, ed., 2019).

[14] John Hill, 'Revisiting British Film Studies', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* (7:2) (August 2010), 299.

[15] Hill, 'Revisiting British Film Studies', 306.

[16] John Orr, *Romantics and Modernists in British Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010); Sarah Street, *British National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1997).

[17] Alan Lovell, 'The British Cinema: The Unknown Cinema' (London: British Film Institute Education Department, 1969); Alan Lovell, 'The British Cinema: The Known Cinema', in *The British Cinema Book* (Murphy, ed.) (London: British Film Institute, 2009).

[18] Realism as both a production mode and critical discourse in British cinema is examined in Hallam and Marshment (2000) and Forrest (2013; 2020). And while it was established in the writing of practitioners of the Documentary Film Movement, it is primarily examined in relation to studies of the British New Wave (1959-1963) and social realism. For example, John Hill (1986), Samantha Lay (2002) and Taylor (2006).

has inscribed British cinema, represented by the Documentary Film Movement and the British New Wave, as a realist cinema.[19] Jointly, John Ellis's 'Art, Culture and Quality' and Julian Petley's 'The Lost Continent' have dominated the historiography of British cinema and thus been central in the institutionalisation and maintenance of a binary opposition between realism and fantasy in British film studies.[20] The realism-fantasy binary has been central to legitimisation of British cinema in shaping the construction of a national canon. Furthermore, the realism-fantasy binary has also been central to the legitimisation of cult film sensibilities in mainstream British film culture.

Throughout British film scholarship, the reproduction of critical assumptions about the realism-fantasy binary has resulted in it becoming naturalised and dominant in both critical and academic discourse.[21] Moreover, these established critical assumptions have begun to be interrogated through historical revisionism. Significantly, Henry K. Miller has recently argued that British film culture has been defined through "inherited terms […] derived from a narrow range of evidence".[22] Furthermore, Miller argues that the repetition of these terms falsely present that British genre films are still "marginalised in critical and academic writing".[23] Therefore, an aim of this literature review is not simply to reproduce these critical assumptions but instead, examine them and apply in relation to the scholarship about Ken Russell.

### 1.2.1 British Traditional Film Criticism: institutionalisation and conceptualisation

During the 19th and early 20th Century, British cultural and literary criticism developed and institutionalised in response to the introduction of industrialised mass culture. As part of this process, moral standards were conflated with aesthetic hierarchies of value to construct cultural boundaries and establish legitimate taste. During the 19th Century, cultural criticism combined the impressionistic approach of William Hazlitt and the aesthetic-moral approach of Matthew Arnold. Significantly, Arnold's model of moral-cultural reformation aimed to reinforce

[19] Andrew Higson, 'Critical Theory and British Cinema', 91-93.
[20] John Ellis, 'Art, Culture and Quality: Terms for a Cinema in the Forties and the Seventies', *Screen* (19:3) (1978): 9–50; Julian Petley, 'The Lost Continent', in *All Our Yesterdays* (Barr, ed.) (London: British Film Institute, 1986), 98–119.
[21] The realism-fantasy binary, or 'realism and tinsel', is repeated throughout British film scholarship. Particularly, in studies of British horror, such as: Hutchings (1993; 2001), Chibnall and Petley (eds., 2002), and Egan (2007). And in studies of and Gainsborough Melodrama, such as: Aspinall and Murphy (1983) and Cook (1996; ed., 1997).
[22] Henry K. Miller, 'Return to the Lost Continent', *New Review of Film and Television Studies* (12:4) (2014), 414.
[23] Hill, 'Revisiting British Film Studies', 308.

middle-class standards through cultural distinction – that is, the promotion of "the best which has been thought and said"[24] – was paternalistically adopted and disseminated by cultural institutions.[25]

In regard to British cultural criticism and the development of film criticism, the institutionalisation of literary criticism in the academy has been central to the maintenance of national-cultural distinctions and the reproduction of middle-class taste, aesthetic standards and moral values.[26] Primarily, in the construction of a canon in response to the perceived cultural threat of Americanisation. Journalistic film criticism developed during the 1920s in response to the increasing popularity of the medium. In establishing film criticism as a legitimate form of cultural criticism, university-educated film critics in broadsheet newspapers, or the 'quality press', adapted the established practices of literary and dramatic criticism. Therefore, university-educated cultural critics in the quality press reproduced and disseminated institutionalised middle-class taste and the moral-aesthetic standards, values and assumptions of literary criticism as naturalised principles.[27] Mattias Frey has defined traditional British film criticism as impressionistic and expositionary which privileged subject-matter over aesthetics and whose critics "doubted film's status as art and repudiated their responsibility to treat the moral or social issues".[28]

John Ellis's 'Art, Culture and Quality: Terms for a Cinema in the Forties and Seventies' was first published in the journal *Screen* (1969-) and has been central to the conceptualisation of traditional British film criticism.[29] Through a selective analysis of press clippings held at the BFI National Archives, Ellis identified a historical consensus in the journalistic film criticism

[24] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1869).

[25] Though eventually applied to popular culture, the Arnoldian mode of moral-aesthetic criticism was empirical, anti-theoretical and suspicious of the mass media itself. Moreover, Arnoldian cultural reformation was imperialistic and had a far-reaching influence on British cultural institutions such as the civil service and public service broadcasting. Arnold is referenced in Chapter One in relation to the BBC.

[26] Broadly, British literary criticism incorporates ideas from Romantic criticism and the Bloomsbury Group and combines these with the methodological approach of New Criticism. Here, empiricism, a suspicion of theory, and an emphasis on human relationships are stressed. This includes Individual writers, such as: A.C. Bradley, F. R. Leavis, L. C. Knights and Denys Thompson.

[27] Paul Rixon, *TV Critics and Popular Culture: A History of Television Criticism* (London: I.B. Tauris. 2011), 81.

[28] Mattias Frey, *The Permanent Crisis of Film Criticism* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 64.

[29] John Ellis, 'Art, Culture and Quality', 9–50; John Ellis, 'The Quality Film Adventure: British Critics and the Cinema, 1942-1948', in *Dissolving Views* (Andrew Higson, ed.) (London: Cassell, 1996).

practiced in the quality press during the 1940s.[30] In 'Arts, Culture and Quality', Ellis proposed that film critics during the Second World War developed the concept of the 'quality film' and – as both documentary practitioners and techniques had been absorbed into narrative filmmaking – foregrounded realism in critical discourse in an attempt to define a distinct national cinema in opposition to what was considered the 'trivial' entertainments of Hollywood.[31]

In 'Arts, Cult and Quality', Ellis defined 'quality criticism' as a prescriptive form of criticism and identified a set of naturalised principles and assumptions around a shared moral-aesthetic hierarchy of taste, standards and values: called the 'quality criteria'. Specifically, Ellis defined the quality criteria as: the coherence and appropriateness of style, subject and theme; formal unity, unobtrusive style and a restrained tone that the served narrative; a moral imperative toward realist narrative and aesthetics, and social, historical and psychological verisimilitude; serious, or universal, themes and issues; and a discrimination between surface appearance and deeper values.[32] Furthermore, Ellis proposed that negative critical reception centred on a film not sharing a broad humanist perspective or conforming to the above criteria. Particularly, if a film "lacks purpose, is constructed episodically or in a mixture of styles" or is a "misrepresentation of place and character for the sake of convention".[33] Regarding film authorship, Ellis identified that quality critics privileged films that expressed a personal vision but considered the film director to be "rarely an individual artist, more usually he is a dominating personality, influencing the contributions of others."[34]

Regarding the conceptualisation of traditional criticism as quality criticism, it is important to note Ellis neither considered: the underlying role of literary criticisms in structuring critical response; the distinctions in journalistic criticism between the broadsheet, middlebrow and tabloid press; the alternative hierarchies of critical taste, standards and values in the trade press;

[30] Melanie Bell (2010; 2011; 2011) and Melanie Selfe (2012) have interrogated Ellis's conceptualisation of 1940s British film criticism. Primarily, through gender and the centrality of female film critics such as C. A. Lejeune of *The Observer* and Dilys Powell of *The Sunday Times*.

[31] In outlining the prescriptive criteria of quality film, Ellis paraphrases film critics from the 1940s: "The quality film has purpose, form, and morality. It is linked to a strong humanist perspective, stressing the importance of international understanding between the various cultures of mankind. […] This is a unified construction, harnessing technique to produce a flowing visual narrative which refuses to indulge in overstated emotionality. It is imperative that this film have a close and deep relation to reality, not only reproducing its surface, but touching the very spirit of the real" (1978: 34).

[32] Ellis, 'Art, Culture and Quality', 20-34.

[33] Ellis, 23, 28.

[34] Ellis, 35.

and in consideration of the above, the nuanced reception of popular cinema.[35] Furthermore, regarding negative critical reception: rather than failing to conform to the quality criteria, films that did not meet the naturalised critical standards or established critical expectations received a negative assessment. Therefore, a central theme in traditional film criticism was appropriateness and due seriousness. Here, Peter Hutchings has identified popular entertainment, such as genre films, were valued if in 'good taste' and Sheldon Hall has identified this underlying naturalised principle as: "good of its kind".[36]

Moreover, contemporary definitions of film criticism exist. For example, Roger Manvell, editor of *Penguin Film Review* (1946-1949) and Director of the British Film Academy (1947-1959), proposed that it was the responsibility of the film critic to discriminate art from entertainment and evaluate a film based on: a film technique that stressed the 'indivisibility' of character, subject and theme; humanist aesthetics; and artistic expression.[37] Regarding film authorship, a distinction is made in traditional film criticism between film directors: the competent technician or craftsman; the sensitive artist with personal predications and an original style; and the showman.[38] Furthermore, authorial responsibility is a central concern for traditional film critics. Particularly, individual moral responsibility over the film, in line with critical criteria such as appropriateness and due seriousness, with versatility and sensitivity considered directorial virtues.

### 1.2.2. The Development of British Film Criticism: the introduction of cinephile criticism and the distinction of film authorship

Regarding traditional film criticism, the British Film Institute (BFI), and its specialist periodicals *Sight & Sound* (1932- ) and *Monthly Film Bulletin* (1934-1991), have been central to the construction and dissemination of legitimate taste, and the maintenance of critical standards and values in British film culture. Mattias Frey identified the BFI has consolidated

[35] Alternative critical taste, standards and values can be identified in the trade press whose central concerns can be summarised as generic categorisation, production quality and commercial potential.
[36] Peter Hutchings, *Hammer and Beyond: The British Horror Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 5-6; Sheldon Hall, 'Good of Its Kind? British Film Journalism', in *The Routledge Companion to British Cinema History* (Hunter, Porter, and Smith, eds.) (London: Routledge, 2017), 279.
[37] Roger Manvell, *A Seat at the Cinema* (London: Evans Brothers, 1951), 100, 109, 124.
[38] Manvell, *A Seat at the Cinema*, 141.

cultural authority through the institutionalisation of a broad-church national film culture fostered around liberal humanism as a taste culture and the construction of a canon.[39] Furthermore, the BFI consolidated critical authority through *Sight & Sound* whose contributors also practiced traditional film criticism in broadsheet newspapers.[40]

A central moment in the consolidation of critical authority at *Sight & Sound* was the assimilation of a younger generation of film critics from the Oxford undergraduate magazine: *Sequence* (1946-1952). In becoming editor of *Sight & Sound* (1956-1990), Penelope Houston pursued a liberal humanist attitude that re-affirmed an international art-film canon that privileged moral realism.[41] Retaining the Arnoldian mode of moral-aesthetic criticism and the position that criticism was a matter of personal response and the expression of cultivated taste, traditional critical taste broadened to accommodate aspects of cinephile film criticism.[42]

Beginning with the New Left in the late-1950s, the central post-war critical development was the legitimisation of popular culture through ascribing authorship, and its challenge to established cultural hierarchies and taste. During this period, a perceived challenge to the critical authority of *Sight & Sound* came from an emerging generation of Oxbridge-educated film critics associated with the journal: *Movie* (1962-2000).[43] In reasserting the standards of literary criticism, the cinephile critics at *Movie* aimed to improve the standards of British film criticism with a greater emphasis on empirical close-reading and the romantic re-conceptualisation of the film-director-as-author through *auteurism*.[44] For reference, *auteurism* is a historical critical and industrial concept of film authorship that transposed the romantic concept of the author to the film director; and in doing so, made the distinction of the artist

[39] Mattias Frey, 'The Critical Question: Sight and Sound's Postwar consolidation of liberal taste', *Screen* (54:2) (June 2013); Frey, *The Permanent Crisis of Film Criticism*.

[40] Alongside Frey, the BFI and film criticism have been examined in Nowell-Smith (2006), a special issue of *Cinema Journal* about the BFI (Miller, Nowell-Smith eds., 2008), Dupin and Nowell-Smith (eds., 2012) and Lowell MacDonald (2016).

[41] Frey, *The Permanent Crisis of Film Criticism*, 72, 75, 77-78.

[42] John Gibbs, *The Life of Mise-En-Scène: Visual Style and British Film Criticism, 1946-78* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); John Gibbs, 'Sequence and the Archaeology of British Film Criticism', *Journal of Popular British Cinema* (4) (2001).

[43] V. F. Perkins, *Film as Film* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972); Ian Cameron (ed.), *Movie Reader* (London: Praeger, 1972); John Gibbs, *The Life of Mise-En-Scène*; Alan Lovell, 'Robin Wood — A Dissenting View', *Screen* (10:2) (February 1969); Sam Rohdie, 'Review: *Movie* Reader, *Film as Film*', *Screen* (13:4) (December 1972); V. F. Perkins, 'A Reply to Sam Rohdie', *Screen* (13:4) (December 1972).

[44] Film authorship and the development auteurism in Britain is examined further in Durgnat (1967: 61-86), Buscombe (1973), Caughie (ed., 1981) and Hall (2019). In general, film authorship is examined Staiger and Gerstner (eds., 2003), Grant (ed., 2008) and Sellors (2010).

within an industrial system.[45] Primarily, this was applied to Hollywood cinema through the analysis of *mise-en-scène* to identify authorial meaning through film style.[46] A central editorial position of *Movie*, expressed by Ian Cameron, being: "the director is the author of the film, the person who gives it any distinctive quality it may have".[47]

Despite *Movie's* challenge to *Sight & Sound*'s established taste culture, British traditional and cinephile film critics were both informed by the same national-cultural tradition of literary criticism. Particularly, in sharing traditional aesthetics standards and moral-aesthetic values. For example, adopting the romantic conceptualisation of authorship and valuing moral realism and a coherent whole as an expression of truth. For reference, Andrew Bennett defined the romantic author as the primary source of meaning for a literary text, who is then "designated as autonomous, original and expressive".[48] Furthermore, Bennett summarises that the romantic author as a single-author has historically been conceived as an artist and genius: "inspired by forces outside himself, […] that allow him to produce works of originality […] to such an extent that he will necessarily be neglected in his own time and only fully appreciated in the future, after his death."[49]

*Sequence* and then *Movie* prompted *Sight & Sound* to shift its taste culture toward international art cinema and accommodate to what they considered to be serious aspects of Hollywood cinema. Significantly, *Movie* challenged established critical taste through film authorship. In his study of British film authorship, Peter Hutchings distinguished that: "*Sight and Sound*'s presentation of directors […] as important functionaries within the film industry, contrasts with *Movie's* presentation of directors [as] *auteurs*."[50] For traditional critics, the film author was the 'talent' responsible for the unified design of a film which could either be the single author or a collaborative effort. Particularly, between a screenwriter and director with a shared

[45] Introduced in France in *Cahiers du Cinema* as 'la politique des *auteurs'* (1954). The concept was adapted into 'the auteur theory' by the critic Andrew Sarris (1962) to legitimise Hollywood as a national cinema. Here, the distinction was made between the *auteur* as artist – that is, rising above the conditions of production through personal style – and the *metteur-en-scène* as a competent technician. In Britain, *auteurism* was formalised at *Movie* through *mise-en-scène* analysis and later further theorised through *auteur*-structuralism.

[46] *Movie* refined its use of literary criticism to distinguish itself from *Sight & Sound*. Primarily, adopting the 'objective' close-reading of New Criticism as a methodology. Specifically, identifying patterns and the organisation of formal devices in evaluating the synthesis of style and meaning in a film.

[47] Ian Cameron, 'Films, Directors and Critics' (1962), in *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader* (Grant, ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2008), 31.

[48] Andrew Bennett, *The Author* (London: Routledge, 2005), 55-57.

[49] Bennett, *The Author*, 59-60.

[50] Hutchings, 'The Histogram and the List', *Journal of Popular British Cinema* (4) (2001), 34.

viewpoint.[51] Regarding British film directors, traditional critics paid attention to a small number of 'special talents' who were considered technicians that had acquired international reputations. Particularly, Alfred Hitchcock, Carol Reed and David Lean.

Primarily, *Movie* elevated Hollywood filmmakers at the expense of British cinema. In particular, American film directors such as Howard Hawks, Otto Preminger and Nicholas Ray. Both *Sight & Sound* and *Movie* shared the position that British cinema was largely a middlebrow cinema that possessed neither the artistry of European cinema nor the popularity of Hollywood. In the first issue of *Movie*, British cinema – represented by the film director Basil Dearden – is positioned as parochial and authorially impoverished. Firstly, the editorial board's 'Talent Histogram' relegated British film directors to the "competent and ambitious" and "the rest" categories.[52] Secondly, V. F. Perkins stated in his assessment of British Cinema and traditional British film criticism that: "British cinema is as dead as before. Perhaps, it never was alive".[53] However, *Movie* did favour a select number of British film directors such as 'American' Hitchcock and Ealing Studio alumni – such as Robert Hamer, Alexander Mackendrick and Seth Holt – and British films made by American expatriate directors such as Joseph Losey and Richard Lester.[54]

It is important to note that despite the popularisation of the film-director-as-author in British film culture from the 1960s onwards, traditional film critics were somewhat suspicious of *auteurism*, alongside academic film theory. However, *auteurism* was more readily accepted when a new generation of university-educated film critics, and their taste culture, emerged in the mid-1980s. For reference, the disciplination and institutionalisation of British film studies began during the 1970s. Regarding the impact of *auteurism* on authorial reputation, Robert E. Kapsis identified that Alfred Hitchcock's international reputation was reshaped, from popular entertainer to serious artist, as auteurism became the dominant critical discourse among journalistic film critics in France and the United States.[55] Regarding national-cultural specificities, Kapsis also identified that Hitchcock had a different reputational development in

[51] Manvell, *A Seat at the Cinema*, 148-149.
[52] Editorial Board, 'Talent Histogram: British and American', *Movie* (1) (June 1962), 1.
[53] V. F. Perkins, 'The British Cinema', *Movie* (1) (June 1962), 7.
[54] Hutchings, 'The Histogram and the List'.
[55] Robert E. Kapsis, *Hitchcock: The Making of a Reputation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

Britain.[56] In Britain, critical and popular expectations about Hitchcock were established in the 1930s on a series of espionage thrillers that shared a sophisticated combination of suspense, dry humour and romance.[57] Therefore, the consensus between journalistic British film critics until the early-1980s, after Hitchcock's death and the re-release of several of his American films, was that the relative restraint and understatement of 'British Hitchcock' was superior to the spectacle of 'American Hitchcock'.[58]

### 1.2.3. The Legitimisation of British Cinema: academic institutionalisation and the development of British Film Revisionism

During the 1970s, the institutionalisation of film studies in the British academy and the expansion of film publishing resulted in the legitimisation of British cinema as a national cinema.[59] Alongside the academic journal *Monogram* (1971-1975), *Screen* (1969-) was influential in the development of post-structuralist film theory and the formal conceptualisation of British cinema as a realist cinema.[60] Simultaneously, a series of monographs and edited collections contributed to the re-conceptualisation of British cinema from a realist cinema to a national cinema established on distinct traditions of realism and fantasy: or more specifically, realism and romanticism.

Following the reflectionist approach of Raymond Durgnat's *A Mirror for England*, British film revisionism aimed to locate previously unconsidered aspects of British cinema within their historical, industrial and socio-cultural contexts. Particularly, in examining film studios associated with popular film genres such as Gainsborough Pictures and melodrama, Hammer Film Productions and horror, and Ealing Studios and comedy. Here, monographs such as David Pirie's *A Heritage of Horror* and Charles Barr's *Ealing Studios* legitimised British cinema

[56] This does not mean Hitchcock was not treated with due seriousness in British film culture. This was primarily based on Hitchcock's reputation as a craftsman established with *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1927) and evidenced in the thrillers he made for Gaumont-British during the 1930s. And alongside Robin Wood's *Hitchcock's Films* (1965), the BFI's National Film Theatre ("Friday Night is Hitchcock Night") and the BBC both held separate retrospectives to coincide with Hitchcock's 70th birthday in 1969.

[57] Kapsis, *Hitchcock*, 26, 63, 154.

[58] Kapsis, *Hitchcock*, 44-45, 150-151.

[59] This is not discounting other contributing factors during the 1970s, which include: the role of the BFI Education Department and Charles Barr's appointment as film lecturer at the University of East Anglia (UEA) in 1976; programming at the National Film Theatre such as the decade-long 'British Cinema' strand; and the re-circulation of British films on television which subsequently increased following the introduction of Channel 4 in 1982.

[60] The development of British film studies has been explored in more detail in Grieveson and Wasson (eds., 2008), Bolas (2009), Dupin and Nowell-Smith (eds., 2012), Petrie and Stoneman (eds., 2014), Gibbs (2013) and Miller (2016).

through locating its popular cinema within national-cultural traditions and allegory.[61] For example, British horror films as part of the Gothic literary tradition and Ealing's output in relation to British society and culture during the Second World War and the immediate post-War period.

As a national-cultural institution, the BFI has also been central to the development of academic film studies and the legitimisation of British cinema through the construction of a national film canon.[62] Following the foundational literature of the 1970s, the BFI published the principal edited collection about British cinema during the 1980s: Charles Barr's *All Our Yesterdays*.[63] This collection is significant because alongside Charles Barr's introduction 'Amnesia and Schizophrenia', which examined British cinema as a discursive construction, Julian Petley's chapter 'The Lost Continent' challenged the conceptualisation of British cinema as a realist cinema.[64] However, Petley reproduced established critical assumptions about British cinema that had been assimilated into academic discourse because of articles such as Ellis's 'Art, Culture and Quality'.

Despite reproducing many of Ellis's assumptions, Petley's 'The Lost Continent' is significant to the re-conceptualisation of British cinema because of its influence on academic discourse, critical taste and the contemporaneous construction of the British film canon. As a conceptual metaphor, Petley identified the 'Lost Continent' of British cinema as a "repressed" counter-tradition of "anti-realism" that he argued had been excluded from film history because it was "received critically with fear and disapproval."[65] Subsequently, Petley's redefinition of British cinema as a binary opposition between realism and fantasy influenced the wider critical taste and discourse. Primarily, the inversion of critical taste and discourse with fantasy replacing realism as the dominant in hierarchies of aesthetic value. Arguably, Petley's challenge to historical attitudes towards British has also led to the reproduction of the very critical

[61] Raymond Durgnat, *A Mirror for England: British Movies from Austerity to Affluence* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970); David Pirie, *A Heritage of Horror: The English Gothic Cinema 1946-1972* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1973); Charles Barr, *Ealing Studios* (London: Cameron & Tayleur, 1977).
[62] For example, BFI publications such as *Gainsborough Melodrama* (Aspinall and Murphy, ed. 1983), *National Fictions* (Hurd, ed. 1985), *All Our Yesterdays* (Barr, ed. 1986). Followed by *The Cinema Book* (Cook, ed. 1985), *Sixties British Cinema* (1992) and *The British Cinema Book* (Murphy ed., 1997).
[63] Barr (ed.), *All Our Yesterdays*.
[64] Charles Barr, 'Introduction: Amnesia and Schizophrenia', in *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema* (Barr, ed.) (British Film Institute, 1986) 1-30; Petley, 'The Lost Continent'.
[65] Julian Petley, 'The Lost Continent'.

assumptions he aimed to challenge:[66] especially that popular British cinema was negatively received and the romanticised trope that the fantasy tradition is still marginalised in discussions of British cinema.[67]

Throughout this period, film authorship was also central to the legitimisation of British cinema. In line with broader critical developments around film authorship, Peter Hutchings has argued that the figure of the author-director was used in a traditional manner to legitimise British cinema.[68] Particularly, through historical revisionism and incorporating filmmakers into a national canon. Primarily, through the reappraisal of filmmakers who were considered to have been critically maligned. Regarding the author-director, traditional film criticism considered British film authorship to be characterised by teamwork, craftsmanship, and artistic restraint.[69] And in accordance, British film revisionism located the author-director within collaborative activity emerging from historical, cultural and industrial contexts.[70]

Regarding the legitimisation of British cinema through film authorship, the re-evaluation of the filmmakers Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, their dual-authorship ascribed as 'The Archers', has been central to British film revisionism and centralising the romantic tradition in the British film canon. Following the publication of Ian Christie's edited collection *Powell, Pressburger and Others*, that included his proto-critical reception study 'The Scandal of *Peeping Tom*', Powell and Pressburger have been romanticised in British film history and incorporated into the British film canon as the primary victims of the realism discourse in British cinema.[71] In consideration of Ellis and subsequently reinforced in Petley, Powell and Pressburger have been rehabilitated as filmmakers on the presumption that their films received a negative critical reception due to fantasy and excess.[72] Moreover, recent historical revisionism that has utilised archival material has challenged this presumption. For example, James Chapman identifies that the negative critical reception of Powell and Pressburger centred

[66] As stated earlier, Henry K. Miller revaluates both Ellis and Petley in 'Return to the Lost Continent' (2014). Primarily, Miller argues that both are based on a narrow range of evidence and are therefore, flawed accounts (2014: 412). Arguably, this argument could be levelled at this PhD thesis as I have relied on the press clippings in the BFI Reuben Library.
[67] Popular cinema in Britain was never marginalised. Rather, it was the dominant mode of film production and valued by the trade press and fan magazines, alongside audiences themselves. Rather than disfavour, traditional critics were instead indifferent to aspects they considered 'trivial' such as melodrama and horror as genres.
[68] Peter Hutchings, 'The Histogram and the List'.
[69] John Russell Taylor, *Masterworks of British Cinema* (London: Lorimer Press, 1974), 7.
[70] Hutchings, 'The Histogram and the List'.
[71] Ian Christie, *Powell, Pressburger and Others* (London: British Film Institute, 1978); Ian Christie, 'The Scandal of Peeping Tom', ed. Ian Christie (London: British Film Institute, 1978); Henry K. Miller, 'Return to the Lost Continent'.
[72] Miller, 'Return to the Lost Continent', 423, 425.

around the perceived absence of serious allegory rather than the fantasy elements within their films.[73] Here, a stronger argument is that they were neglected due to the indifferent attitude toward British cinema and the decline of their own careers.[74]

### 1.2.4. The Development of Niche Film Criticism and British Film Cult Fandom, and the Legitimisation of Cult Film Taste and Discourse in British Film Culture

During the 1980s and 1990s, the introduction of new media technology, the expansion of media commentary and legitimisation of cult film sensibilities resulted in the development of niche criticism and the revision of critical taste, standards and values. Regarding traditional criticism, Sue Harper and Justin Smith identified that, despite the decline of humanism as a critical discourse, the expository mode and "unmethodical but mannerly" technique of traditional film criticism continued into the 1970s.[75] However, traditional critics increasingly foregrounded their own personal experience and modified their moral-aesthetic hierarchies of values in response to increasing formal experimentation and subjective realism in contemporary cinema.[76] The closure of *Films and Filming* and the retirement of Penelope Houston as editor of *Sight & Sound* in 1990, and the introduction of home video reviews in *Sight & Sound* represents the shift from traditional criticism, and a broad humanist taste culture, to niche criticism, and a taste culture informed by the development of cult film fandom.

Ernst Mathijs and Jamie Sexton have defined niche film criticism as "a form of criticism that has a strong emphasis on alignment toward, closeness to and experience of the object of scrutiny."[77] Regarding British film criticism, a new generation of critics and publications

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[73] James Chapman, 'The True Business of the British Movie? *A Matter of Life and Death* and British Film Culture', *Screen* (46:1) (March 2005).

[74] The narrative around Powell and Pressburger's authorial rehabilitation needs to be fully re-assessed. Arguably, it happened over a longer period of time and included broader factors such as cultural circulation, critical and institutional framing, and separate national reputations. For example, the circulation of their films on British commercial television from the late 1960s, including *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960); critical assessments and institutional retrospectives of their work from the mid-1960s, seen in Raymond Durgnat's article for *Movie* (O. O. Green, 1965) and Kevin Gough-Yates's BFI dossier that coincided with a National Film Theatre retrospective (December 1970 – January 1971); Powell's distinct North American authorial reputation, evidenced in his later consultation to 'New Hollywood' filmmakers such as Francis Ford Coppola and Martin Scorsese; and Powell's own self-romanticisation (1986, 1992).

[75] Sue Harper and Justin Smith (eds.), *British Film Culture in the 1970s: The Boundaries of Pleasure* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 224.

[76] Ellis, 'Art, Culture and Quality', 46-47.

[77] Ernest Mathijs and Jamie Sexton, *Cult Cinema: An Introduction* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 52.

emerged who were informed by the cultural developments of the 'Long Sixties'. Particularly, the legitimisation of popular culture, the disciplination of film studies in academia and the development of cinephile and cult film sensibilities. Arthur Marwick defined the 'Long Sixties' as an extended periodisation from 1958 to 1974, that accounts for the socio-cultural transformation and the aesthetic and thematic preoccupations of the period.[78] These include, for instance, the redefinition of socio-cultural hierarchies, boundaries and consensus, and the renegotiation between public and private behaviour associated with the permissive society. In line with the developments of the 'Long Sixties', the establishment of cult sensibilities in Anglo-American film culture is central to the transition from traditional to niche film criticism.[79] The establishment of cult film sensibilities is primarily understood to have begun in the US with the recirculation of classical Hollywood cinema in cinephile criticism and on network television which promoted the development of ironic reading strategies.[80]

The establishment of cult film sensibilities and the legitimisation of cult film taste and discourse in British film culture have primarily been examined by Justin Smith in *Withnail and Us: Cult Films and Film Cults in British Cinema* and I. Q. Hunter in *British Trash Cinema*. As stated above, Smith identified that the emergence of cult film sensibilities in the United Kingdom was associated with the cultural redefinitions of the 'Long Sixties". Primarily, in regard to cultural permissiveness and the liberalisation of censorship, the concentration of overseas directors in Britain, an openness towards the avant-garde and the production of a new type of film that would later be appropriated as cult.[81] Furthermore, Smith has defined these films of the 'Long Sixties' as belonging to a cinema of irony and disavowal that share a set of textual features and thematic preoccupations. This includes but is not limited to: generic hybridity, narrative incoherence, and stylistic excess; a performative mode of irony expressed

[78] Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, 1958-1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5-7.

[79] Arguably, the development of cult sensibilities is nationally and culturally specific. Therefore, this accounts for regional inflections. For example, camp was a legitimate tradition in British theatrical culture prior to its formal conceptualisation in the US. Furthermore, British culture had the necessary ironic distance from American popular culture which permitted the ironic reading strategies necessary for the establishment of Pop Art. Arguably national-cultural specificities become more blurred with online film culture and streaming.

[80] Susan Sontag, 'Notes on Camp', in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Penguin, 2009); Robert B. Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema: 1930–1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Harry M. Benshoff, 'Beyond the Valley of the Classical Hollywood Cinema: Rethinking the "Loathsome Film" of 1970', in *The Shifting Definitions of Genre: Essays on Labelling Films, Television Shows and Media* (Geraghty and Jancovich, ed.) (London: McFarland, 2008).

[81] Justin Smith, *Withnail and Us: Cult Films and Film Cults in British Cinema* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 35, 42; I.Q. Hunter, *British Trash Cinema* (London: BFI Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 214.

through camp, pastiche and nostalgia; and themes such as masculinity, adolescent rites-of-passage and the boundaries of sexual permission.[82]

Smith identified that the development of cult film fandom and legitimisation of cult film taste happened in British film culture as a result of the fragmentation of film exhibition and the formation of niche taste-communities between 1976 and 1996.[83] Furthermore, Smith identifies that the proliferation of film clubs and repertory cinemas, such as the Scala, the re-circulation of British genre films on television and the introduction of home video permitted "marginalised, neglected or critically debased films to find niche audiences in a range of locations."[84] Here, both Smith and Hunter consider the 'Video Nasties' phenomenon and the implementation of the Video Recordings Act (1985) to be the formative moment in the formalisation of cult film sensibilities into cult film fandom.[85] Particularly, in the formation of an oppositional film fandom that foregrounded the politics of taste through their preference for the horror genre and their concern for film censorship.

During the 1980s, a new generation of British film critics emerged who possessed a more personalised, or subcultural, approach to critical standards, values and taste because they considered themselves film fans. Influenced by the professionalisation of fan film criticism in the United States, seen in publications such as *Cinefantastique* (1967-2006) and *Fangoria* (1979- ), British film critics, such as Kim Newman and Mark Kermode, contributed to the revision of critical taste, standards and values in line with cult film sensibilities and cult film fandom. Initially this was through the critical reception of repertory films in listing magazines, such as *Time Out* (1968- ) and *City Life* (1983-2005), but broadened to home video releases in youth-culture and film-entertainment magazines: such as *Blitz* (1980-1991), *The Face* (1980-2004) and *Empire* (1989- ). However, this development in British film criticism was informed by earlier critical revisions in established specialist publications, such as *Monthly Film Bulletin*, where younger film critics embraced either a serious or ironic consideration of genre films; the latter through camp, nostalgia and potential pleasures in bad taste.

[82] Smith, *Withnail and Us*, 35, 42.
[83] Smith, *Withnail and Us*, 87, 214.
[84] Hunter, *British Trash Cinema,* 87.
[85] Kate Egan, *Trash Or Treasure? Censorship and the Changing Meanings of the Video Nasties* (Manchester University Press, 2007).

Following this new generation of film critics, a new generation of film scholars, who identified as film fans, emerged during the 1990s. In line with British film revision, these fan-scholars aimed to legitimise cult taste and discourse in the academy through their own canon construction. Here, Joanne Hollows has argued that both critics and academics converted their subcultural capital into either "economic capital through the pursuit of subcultural 'careers' in magazines, retailing and distribution" or into "legitimate cultural capital […] in academic accounts of cult."[86] Regarding the latter, Jacinda Read further argues that the fan-scholar "functions to construct distinctions within academic culture rather than blur the boundary between fan and academic.[87] Hunter identified the generational change amongst film critics and academics, who identified as fans, resulted in the legitimate British film canon incorporating "populism, genre cinema and cult favourites". [88] Furthermore, this was reinforced on television through the long-running series *Moviedrome* (BBC Two, 1988-2000) and programmed seasons such as 'The Forbidden Weekend' (BBC Two, 27-29 May, 1995).

Reinforcing the realism-fantasy binary in British film revisionism, the principle behind cult reappraisal for fan-scholars was to recuperate aspects of British film culture that had been critically marginalised on the grounds of taste. Furthermore, cult reputation was established retrospectively on a romanticised combination of textual features and a selective re-interpretation of historical reception and meaning. Primarily, *auteur*-genre films and youth-orientated films associated with the 'Long Sixties' and the topicality of controversy, censorship and negative critical reception. Particularly, films belonging to the horror, science-fiction and crime genres and hybrid art cinema that incorporated camp aesthetics and exploitation elements. Films that have recuperated as cult and were subsequently incorporated into the legitimate British film canon include: *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960), *Witchfinder General* (Michael Reeves, 1968), *Performance* (Donald Cammell, Nicolas Roeg, 1970), *A Clockwork Orange* (Stanley Kubrick, 1971), *Get Carter* (Mike Hodges, 1971), *Straw Dogs* (Sam Peckinpah, 1971), *The Wicker Man* (Robin Hardy, 1973) and *Quadrophenia* (Franc Roddam, 1979). Moreover, Ken Russell's *The Devils* and *Tommy* have also been incorporated into this film canon.[89]

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[86] Joanne Hollows, 'The Masculinity of Cult', in *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste* (Jancovich et al. eds.) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 48-49.
[87] Jacinda Read, 'The Cult of Masculinity: From Fan-Boys to Academic Bad-Boys', in *Defining Cult Movies; The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste* (Jancovich et al. eds.) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 66.
[88] Hunter, *British Trash Cinema,* 8.
[89] Smith, *Withnail and Us* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010); Hunter, *British Trash Cinema*.

### 1.2.5. Literature about Ken Russell: foundational literature about Ken Russell

Literature about Ken Russell can be broadly divided into three periods. Firstly, a period of foundational literature that coincided with the expansion of Anglo-American film publishing during the 1970s.[90] Secondly, a period of autobiography that coincided with the inversion of the realism-fantasy binary in critical discourse during the 1980s. This was written in an attempt to counter reputational decline and reinforced Russell's public persona as *enfant terrible*. And thirdly, a period of revisionist scholarship that began in the 1990s. Broadly, this period of revisionist scholarship encompasses the cult, academic and posthumous re-evaluation of Russell.

Foundational literature about Russell was written at the height of his international standing during the 1970s.[91] Here, a series of influential monographs were written about Russell from an *auteurist* perspective: Australian-born writer John Baxter's *Ken Russell: An Appalling Talent*, American scholar Joseph A. Gomez's *Ken Russell: The Adaptor as Creator*, and American Jesuit Scholar Gene D. Phillips's *Ken Russell*.[92] A central aim of this literature was to counter negative critical reception about Russell and elevate his status as a film director; particularly for American audiences unfamiliar with Russell's established reputation as a writer-director of television biographies.[93]

Broadly, this foundational literature established a series of critical paradigms that has structured subsequent scholarship about Russell.[94] Alongside constructing a distinction between Russell's television and film work, this encompasses: Russell's approach to historical and biographical representation; Russell's approach to adaptation and music; Russell's Catholicism and the representation of sexuality; the ironic relationship between reality and fantasy in his films. Throughout the foundational literature, Russell is also romanticised

[90] The expansion of film publishing is examined by Betz (2008). The expansion of BFI Publishing is examined by Alvarado and Buscombe (2008).

[91] Foundational articles about Russell were published in US. For example, *Film Comment* (Phillips, 1970; Kolker, 1973; Faber, 1975), *Literature/Film Quarterly* (Gomez, 1973; Phillips, 1977; Yacowar, 1980), *Film Quarterly* (Dempsey, 1972; Dempsey, 1977), *The Velvet Light Trap* (Gomez, 1975) and *Journal of Popular Film* (Phillips, 1976).

[92] John Baxter, *An Appalling Talent: Ken Russell* (London: Michael Joseph, 1973); Joseph A. Gomez, *Ken Russell: The Adaptor as Creator* (London: Frederick Muller, 1976); Gene D. Phillips, *Ken Russell* (Boston: Twayne, 1979).

[93] BBC licensing agreements complicated the international sale of Russell's television work. Only *Isadora*, *Dante's Inferno* and *Song of Summer* were broadcast – and repeated – in the US on PBS. Therefore, American writers had to co-operate with Russell for access to the rest of his television work.

[94] Throughout the foundational literature, 'excess' was substituted to assign seriousness. Dempsey (1972) codified this lexicon as: baroque, mannerist, self-conscious, ironic, parodic, and satirical.

through *auteurism* as an outsider and misunderstood artist; a construction that coheres with his own approach to biographical representation.[95] As part of this conceptualisation, negative critical reception and excess were foregrounded.[96]

As suggested, the foundational literature about Russell can be considered a form of reputation management.[97] As the first monograph written about Russell, John Baxter's biographical *An Appalling Talent* is significant because Russell exercised editorial control.[98] Alongside providing a first-person account in alternate chapters, Russell re-drafted the manuscript himself which allowed him to inscribe his preferred biography and authorial intentions. Furthermore, this monograph's title and front cover contributed to the dissemination of Russell's public persona as *enfant terrible*. The title references *The Sunday Times* film critic Dilys Powell's review of *The Boy Friend* and her assessment of Russell as an "The talent is there all right. But somehow, it is an appalling talent".[99] The cover reinforces the title as it features a deliberately contrarian image of Russell: a behind-the-scenes production still from *The Devils* of Russell being crucified, baring his midriff and sticking-out his tongue. Subsequently, an 'appalling talent' becomes shorthand for Russell's authorial reputation.

In comparison, Joseph A. Gomez's *The Adaptor as Creator* attempted to legitimise Russell through literary criticism. Here, Gomez departed from a biographical approach in favour of a more systematic study of Russell's authorial style through his method of adaptation.[100] Gomez conceptualises Russell as the "adaptor-creator […] who uses literary sources as raw material to evolve new artistic entities."[101] Influentially, Gomez proposed that Russell's approach to literary sources and biography incorporated a "tripartite structure" of "the protagonist's own romantic self-image, a more objective view revealed by the perspective of time, and finally

[95] Russell positioning himself as an outsider pre-dates his television career. This is examined in Chapter One.
[96] Additional foundational literature includes: Colin Wilson's *A Director in Search of a Hero* (1974); Thomas R. Atkins's (ed., 1976) collection; Alexander Bland's (1977) tie-in for *Valentino* (Ken Russell, 1977); and Diane Rosenfeldt's (1978) annotated bibliography.
[97] Baxter states that BFI programmer John Gillett suggested the monograph and consulted Gene D. Phillips (Baxter: 1973). To coincide with publication, Baxter also programmed a National Film Theatre (NFT) Russell retrospective in October 1973.
[98] *An Appalling Talent* was developed from taped interviews and correspondences with Russell. Russell unsuccessfully petitioned for royalties for his uncredited editorial contribution. In August 1973, publication was further delayed because of a libel complaint from the film producer Harry Saltzman (*Billion Dollar Brain*). Baxter later contributed to Atkins (ed., 1976).
[99] Powell, 'Guying the dolls', BFI press clippings.
[100] Gomez (1976) was an adaptation of his doctoral thesis: 'The Sources and Films of Ken Russell: The Adaptor as Creator' (University of Rochester, 1975). Gomez (1976) also incorporated: '*Dante's Inferno*: seeing Ken Russell through Dante Gabriel Rossetti', *Literature/Film Quarterly* (1973); '*Mahler* and the Methods of Ken Russell's Films on Composers', *The Velvet Light Trap* (1975). Gomez contributed to Atkins (ed., 1976).
[101] Gomez, *The Adaptor as Creator*, 204.

Russell's personal vision of his subject."[102] Moreover, Gomez's *The Adaptor as Creator* was written with co-operation from both Baxter and Russell.[103] Throughout *The Adaptor as Creator*, Gomez quotes published material from the annotated first draft of *An Appalling Talent*.[104] Similarly, Gene D. Phillips's *Ken Russell* attempted to legitimise Russell through a humanistic approach. Sensitive toward Russell's Catholicism, Phillips based his authority on his long-standing relationship with Russell.[105] And throughout, Phillips uses personal correspondence to evidence his claims.[106] Additionally, Ken Hanke's later *Ken Russell's Films*, also referred to as the 'Red Book',[107] contributed to the foundational literature in the close textual analysis of Russell's films.[108]

Regarding the foundational literature, it is important to note that it neither engages with the sustained analyses of Russell's filmmaking style found in contemporary journalistic British film and television criticism nor critical assessments made by British film scholars[109] Such as, for example, Raymond Durgnat's examination of the flourishing fantasy mode in contemporary British cinema for *Film Comment*: 'The Great British Phantasmagoria'.[110] Anticipating the British film revisionism of the 'Lost Continent', Durgnat proposes that Russell's style has matured to the level of 'cine-mannerist' where he "operates montage (in [Sergei] Eisenstein's sense) at the level of *mise-en-scène"* and "riotously mixes artists' imaginings with what are really little essays in the history of ideas" with "juxtapositions of characteristics from different areas".[111] The 'cine-mannerist' is later re-applied to Russell by Kevin M. Flanagan in the edited collection: *Ken Russell: Re-viewing England's Last*

[102] Gomez, *The Adaptor as Creator*, 35.
[103] Russell would not co-operate with unsympathetic writers. For example, Alexander Bland, ballet critic for *The Observer* (1955-1982), states that his *The Nureyev Valentino: Portrait of a Film,* tie-in for the film, "seemed like an impossible project" because "Russell had from the beginning promised himself to make no comment on his work" (1977: 4).
[104] Gomez, *The Adaptor as Creator*, 44.
[105] Phillips was introduced to Russell during the post-production of *The Music Lovers* (Ken Russell, 1970) and as consultant, advised the BBFC on *The Devils*. Moreover, Baxter and Gomez consulted Phillips in writing their own monographs.
[106] Phillips (1979) also incorporated his writing about Russell from the decade: his articles about Russell from articles for *Film Comment* (1970) and *Journal of Popular Film* (1976); his chapter about Russell from his monograph *The Movie Makers* (1973); and his contributing chapter to Atkins's edited collection (1976).
[107] Again, Russell had a level of involvement. Here, he proof-read, made suggestions, though "never took issue with any value judgements or interpretations" (Hanke, 1984: v).
[108] Ken Hanke, *Ken Russell's Films* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1984).
[109] This does not mean Russell was not considered from an *auteurist* perspective by traditional film critics. For example, John Russell Taylor argued in his review of *Savage Messiah* (Ken Russell, 1972) for *The Times* that: "however, you interpret the term *auteur* there can be no doubt that Ken Russell is one. […] It would be hard to mistake a foot of any of his films for the work of anyone else. They have a complete consistency of vision. But it would be a bold man who therefore decided it was safe to leave his critical faculties in the foyer" (Taylor, 1972).
[110] Raymond Durgnat, 'The Great British Phantasmagoria', *Film Comment* (13:3) (May 1977).
[111] Durgnat, 'The Great British Phantasmagoria', 52, 48.

*Mannerist*.[112] Here, Flannagan places Russell within a broad understanding of Mannerism as to use style in the face of established tradition in which to "unsettle, defamiliarise, or otherwise rework many of the representational codes once thought necessary to the production of good art."[113]

Beginning in the late 1980s, Russell's autobiographical writing can be considered an intervention in reputation management. During this period, there was a reluctance to take Russell seriously and consider him a legitimate subject to be incorporated into the contemporary academic revisionism around British Cinema.[114] In an attempt to counter reputational decline, Russell foregrounded or 'played-up' his public persona as *enfant terrible* through contrarianism in his anecdotal autobiography and memoirs – *A British Picture*, *Fire Over England* and *Directing Film* – but this further undermined serious critical consideration.[115] Factors that contributed to this reluctance centred around critical taste, and include but are not limited to: attitudes towards British culture of the 1970s, a perceived decline in the quality of Russell's output during the 1980s and the circulation of Russell's public persona in contemporary British culture.

Russell's autobiographical writing also corresponds with his approach to biographical representation. Here, Russell romanticises himself as a misunderstood and undervalued outsider to the British film establishment. A secondary theme in Russell's autobiographical writing is his antagonism toward cultural institutions and film critics. Here, Russell reproduces historical attitudes about British cinema being inferior.[116] For example, the title of *A British Picture* is meant to be ironic as Russell considers the literary and realist traditions in British cinema to be parochial.[117] Russell recounts that as a child during the 1930s, "there was no

[112] Kevin M. Flanagan (ed.), *Ken Russell: Re-Viewing England's Last Mannerist* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2009).
[113] Flanagan, *Ken Russell*.
[114] During this period, Russell was considered to belong to the 'anti-realist' tradition but did not have the distinction of filmmakers associated with the emerging institutionalised art cinema. Particularly, Derek Jarman and Peter Greenaway. Alternatively, Armes (1978) and John Walker (1985) offer sympathetic assessments Russell.
[115] Ken Russell, *A British Picture: An Autobiography* (London: Heinemann, 1989); Ken Russell, *Fire Over England: The British Cinema Comes Under Friendly Fire* (London: Hutchinson, 1993); Ken Russell, *Directing Film: From Pitch to Première* (London: B. T. Batsford, 2000).
[116] Russell sensitivity toward criticism began in the 1960s. Russell felt television critics slighted *Elgar* on its first broadcast and resentment toward film critics was established with the failure of *French Dressing* (Russell, 1964) and *Billion Dollar Brain* (Russell, 1967). Russell became publicly antagonistic towards film critics following the reception of *Dance of the Seven Veils* and *The Music Lovers* (Russell, 1970). This is examined in Chapter One and Chapter Two.
[117] Russell states he was influenced by interwar American and European cinema. Particularly, German Expressionism and French Poetic Realism (Russell, 1993: 81). Regarding British cinema of the 1940s, Russell considered Ealing to be "overrated"

greater stigma than a 'British' picture" because "Pictures' were, by definition American."[118] Nevertheless, Russell inserts himself within British film revisionism through positioning himself as simultaneously an outsider to national-cultural traditions and as part of the romantic tradition in British cinema that followed Powell & Pressburger.[119] For example, "I think I would sometimes fare better in the hands of British critics if I was called Russellini. They may forgive Fellini for his excesses, but I am chastised for being theatrical."[120] Such statements reinforce Russell's image as a marginalised outsider and contribute to his later romanticisation as a cult film director. An issue here is that Richard Farmer has identified that "scholars, critics and fans are often willing to take Russell at his word, because his word is frequently so entertaining."[121]

### 1.2.6. Literature About Ken Russell: revisionist literature about Ken Russell

Revisionist scholarship about Russell was written from the mid-1990s and encompasses overlapping periods of revisionism: a period of cult revisionism from an *auteurist* perspective predicated on niche criticism and fandom, and the re-evaluation of *The Devils*; and a period of academic revisionism from historical and post-structuralist perspectives prompted by the academic re-evaluation of the 1970s and following Russell's appearance of *Celebrity Big Brother* in 2007 and death in 2011.

Despite the British film revisionism of the 1980s, Russell was considered difficult to take seriously and recuperate because of his contemporaneous reputation and the declining quality of his work. Here, an outlier is Barry Keith Grant's contribution to the edited collection: *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism*.[122] In 'The Body Politic: Ken Russell in the 1980s', Grant identified that Russell's contemporary reputation for being "vulgar, tasteless,

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and presented a "bogus view of British life", Gainsborough to be "measured in depth of cleavage", and the Herbert Wilcox-Anna Neagle musicals to be "artificially inseminated" (Russell, 1989: 21).

[118] Russell, *A British Picture: An Autobiography*, 6.

[119] Russell can be considered a neo-romantic because his Freudian approach to biography combined romanticism and modernism. Burlesque, literary and vernacular modernism provided a model in which to critique the romanticism of the biographical tradition. Here, Russell followed in the tradition of Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918) and A. J. A. Symons's *The Quest for Corvo* (1934), and *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941).

[120] Russell, *Fire Over England*, 82.

[121] Richard Farmer, 'Ken Russell and Television Advertising', in *ReFocus: The Films of Ken Russell* (Melia, ed.) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 95.

[122] Lester Friedman (ed.), *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism* (Second ed,) (London: Wallflower Press, 2007).

excessive, puerile, misogynistic, and even misanthropic" had become entrenched.[123] Alongside the above, Grant identified Russell was difficult to recuperate in British Film Revisionism of the 1980s because he synthesised practices, modes and stylistic regimes – such as television and film, documentary and drama, and realism and fantasy – which meant binary oppositions could not be straightforwardly delineated.[124]

Central to the academic re-evaluation of Russell has been the legitimisation of British film culture of the 1970s through academic re-evaluation. Prior to its re-evaluation, British cinema of the 1970s was warranted limited attention in histories of British cinema and conceptualised, in comparison to the 1960s, as a period of industrial decline and tastelessness: as the 'decade taste forgot'. Here, the prosperity of the British film industry of the 1960s was built on American investment from Hollywood studios. Therefore, American retrenchment towards the end of the 1960s led to economic instability and cultural uncertainty. Furthermore, personal surveys influenced assessments about the period. For example, Alexander Walker's influential personal surveys based on his film criticism for the *Evening Standard* newspaper: *Hollywood England* and *National Heroes*.[125] Here, Russell is assessed as a 'rogue talent' whose increasing self-indulgence is considered to be both vulgar and self-destructive. In *Hollywood England*, Walker concluded that Russell's "temperament rides roughshod over his talent" and that his "genuine visual flair […] seemed to be flawed by a deep-seated fear of losing film-goers' attention".[126]

The re-evaluation of British film culture of the 1970s has been central to British cult film revisionism. A niche division of British film revisionism, British cult film revisionism primarily concerned the recuperation of films and filmmakers associated with the 'Long Sixties', the construction of a British cult film canon and its incorporation into the legitimate British film canon. New histories of the 1970s have aimed to centralise the decade as one of transition and contradictions.[127] Particularly in regard to British cinema, the fragmentation of

[123] Barry Keith Grant, 'The Body Politic: Ken Russell in the 1980s' (1993), in *Fires Were Started* (Friedman, ed.) (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), 182.
[124] Grant, The Body Politic', 183.
[125] Walker, *Hollywood England*; Alexander Walker, *National Heroes: British Cinema in the Seventies and Eighties* (London: Harrap, 1985).
[126] Walker, *National Heroes*, 83.
[127] The 1970s was reclaimed in the mid-2000s. Political and social strife emphasised in contemporary (Booker, 1980) and recent popular accounts (Haslam, 2005; Sounes, 2006; Wheen, 2009) of the 1970s. New histories (Turner, 2008; Beckett, 2009; Garnett, 2008; Sandbrook 2010, 2012) consider the decade central to the development of post-war history and emphasise its contradictions. Prior to the academic reclamation, British cinema of the 1970s received limited attention and, in selective

audiences and the diversification of cultural taste. Initially, British film culture of the 1970s and cultural distinctions related to the period were re-evaluated by fan-scholars from a cult perspective during the mid-1990s. For example, Leon Hunt's *British Low Culture: From Safari Suits to Sexploitation* revisited aspects of British film culture of the 1970s that were considered 'lowbrow' and had previously been deemed "too offensive to academic study".[128] This cult re-evaluation resulted in a wider academic receptiveness towards the 1970s as a legitimate period of study and created an environment in which to approach Russell. This was confirmed in Russell being included in the second edition of the BFI's *British Cinema Book*. And in Pamela Church Gibson and Andrew Hill's overview of the decade Russell, alongside Nicolas Roeg, were positioned as filmmaker's representative of the 'excess, masquerade and performativity' of the 1970s.[129]

Revisionist literature about Russell was initially written from the perspective of niche criticism through cult discourse by fans and fan-scholars. Russell's cult reputation was influenced by the construction of Russell as a cult filmmaker in the United States. Disseminated in professional fanzines such as *Cinefantastique* and *Video Watchdog* (1990-2000), this American re-categorisation of Russell as a cult filmmaker was prompted by the circulation of Russell's films on home video and centred on Russell's reputation for controversy as 'The *Enfant Terrible* of British cinema'. Removed from the circulation of Russell's public persona in Britian, this reputation focused on Russell's films and categorised them from either serious or ironic perspectives as cult texts. Particularly, *The Devils* and *Altered States* (Ken Russell, 1980) and his contemporaneous films produced by home video distributors: *Crimes of Passion* (Ken Russell, 1984), *Gothic* (Ken Russell, 1986), *Salome's Last Dance* (Ken Russell, 1988), *The Lair of the White Worm* (Ken Russell, 1988) and *Whore* (Ken Russell, 1991). And as part of this cult reputation, the above films association with the science-fiction and horror genres, transgressiveness and campness, and controversy and censorship were foregrounded.

reflectionist accounts, it was represented as one in decline (Perry, 1974; Walker, 1985; Walker, 1985). Its re-elevation has accounted for the fragmentation of visual culture (Moore-Gilbert, 1994; Forster and Harper, 2010) and taste (Hunt, 1998; Gibson and Hill, 2002). Furthermore, partial interventions through edited collections (Newland, 2006; Shail, 2008) gave way wider studies of the period's the wider film culture (Harper and Smith, 2011; Barber, 2011, 2013; Newland, 2013).

[128] Hunt, *British Low Culture*.

[129] Pamela Church Gibson and Andrew Hill, '"Tutte e Marchio!": Excess, Masquerade and Performativity in 70s Cinema', in *The British Cinema Book*, Second Edition (Murphy, ed.) (London; British Film Institute, 2001).

This American re-categorisation of Russell as a cult filmmaker influenced an emerging generation of university-educated niche film critics and fan-scholars in Britain who had been disciplined in media and film studies. In constructing Russell's British cult reputation, these critics and fan-scholars romanticised Russell as an *enfant terrible* from an *auteurist* perspective. Specifically, that he had been maligned by the British film establishment and film critics. These critics and fan-scholars approached Russell in accordance with cult taste and foregrounded through cult discourse, Russell's association with negative critical reception and controversy. Principally, Russell's British cult reputation consolidated around the re-evaluation of *The Devils* and its re-categorisation as a horror film.

Central figures in the cult revisionism of Russell include the film critic and broadcaster Mark Kermode, and the fan-biographer Paul Sutton; both approached Russell from an *auteurist* perspective and re-evaluated *The Devils* as an art-horror film.[130] As a film critic who transitioned from niche to mainstream film criticism and broadcasting, Kermode is a central figure in the legitimisation of cult taste and discourse in British film culture.[131] As a central critical advocate of Russell, Kermode's association began with an interview that accompanies Tim Lucas's article about the censorship of *The Devils* in *Video Watchdog*.[132] Subsequently, Kermode is central to the restoration of a 'director's cut' of *The Devils* – including the documentary, *Hell on Earth: The Desecration and Resurrection of The Devils* (Channel 4, 25 November 2002) – and has repeatedly written about Russell in *Sight & Sound* and the mainstream press.[133] As an independent historian, Paul Sutton centralised himself as Russell's biographer.[134] Beginning with a polemic written about *The Devils* for the fanzine *Necronomicon*, Sutton eventually self-published an *auteurist* biography about Russell's formative years: *Becoming Ken Russell*.[135] This was followed by Russell's unrealised script

[130] *The Devils* as an art-horror film is examined in Joan Hawkin's contributing chapter to *A Companion to the Horror Film* (2014): '"Moody Three": Revisiting Ken Russell's *The Devils*' (501-518).
[131] Kermode has outlined his critical approach and taste, specifically a university-educated literary approach combined with cult taste, and throughout his criticism foregrounds his serious concern for the horror genre – particularly, from both a socialist and Catholic perspective – and the censorship of horror films (1997; 2002).
[132] Tim Lucas, 'Cutting the Hell Out of *The Devils*', *Video Watchdog* (September 1996); Mark Kermode, 'The Devil Himself: Ken Russell', *Video Watchdog* (September 1996).
[133] Mark Kermode, 'The Ways and Whims of a Horny Old Devil', *Independent on Sunday* (19 November 2000), BFI press clippings; Mark Kermode, 'Raising Hell', *Sight & Sound* (12: 12) (2002), BFI press clippings; Mark Kermode and Linda Ruth Williams, 'Mythomania: Ken Russell 1927-2011', *Sight & Sound* (22: 2) (2012); Mark Kermode and Ken Russell, 'The return of my masterpiece', *The Times, Times 2*(12 March 2012).
[134] *Becoming Ken Russell* (Sutton, 2012) was written as the first of an unrealised five volumed autobiography and covers the period from 1927 to 1960. Subsequently, Sutton collated the interviews conducted as primary research for the other volumes into *Talking About Ken Russell* (2015).
[135] Paul Sutton, *Becoming Ken Russell: The Authorised Biography of Ken Russell* (Cambridge: Bear Claw Publishing, 2012).

adaptation of *Dracula* and a collection of interviews with Russell's colleagues: *Talking About Ken Russell*.[136] Furthermore, Russell's appearance on *Celebrity Big Brother* (Channel 4, 2006) prompted Joseph Lanza's monograph, *Phallic Frenzy: Ken Russell and His Films*, which reproduced both Russell's biographical approach and material that could be found elsewhere.[137] Additionally, this period of cult revisionism was supplemented online with the fan site *Savage Messiah* (1988 –) edited by Iain Fisher.[138]

### 1.2.7. Literature about Ken Russell: the academic re-evaluation of Ken Russell

From the mid-2000s, British film culture of the 1970s was legitimised by British film historians.[139] Re-evaluation centred around a series of edited collections and culminated in Sue Harper and Justin Smith's edited collection: *British Film Culture in the 1970s*: *The Boundaries of Pleasure*. Harper and Smith challenged the established assumption that British cinema was in decline and lacked taste during that decade.[140] Instead, Harper and Smith argue that the economic vacuum caused by American retrenchment opened a contradictory but transformative cultural space, one of both clumsiness and innovation, in British film. While largely filled with domestic sex comedies and television spin-offs, this space permitted a new generation of directors and producers to come to the fore and push the boundaries of commercial film practice.[141] Furthermore, Harper and Smith concluded that British film culture of the 1970s was preoccupied with the boundaries of permissible taste and pleasure, and was characterised by ironic disavowal with visual and performance styles carrying a burden of meaning in excess of their narrative function.[142] In their study, Harper and Smith concluded that Russell was a significant figure who "confirms his place within the romantic canon but required discipline to produce his best work."[143] Here, discipline refers to adaptation and

[136] Ken Russell, *Ken Russell's Dracula*, ed. Paul Sutton (Cambridge; Bear Claw Publishing, 2012); Paul Sutton, *Talking About Ken Russell* (Buffalo Books, 2015).
[137] Joseph Lanza, *Phallic Frenzy: Ken Russell and His Films* (London: Aurum Press, 2008).
[138] Iain Fisher, *Savage Messiah: A Ken Russell Site by Iain Fisher* (1998-2021), https://www.iainfisher.com/russell.html.
[139] Scholarship that is central to this re-evaluation includes: Moore-Gilbert (ed.) (1994), Hunt (1998), Shail (ed.) (2008), Forster and Harper (eds.) (2010), Newland (ed.) (2010), Harper and Smith (eds.) (2012) and Barber (2013).
[140] Harper and Smith intervene in studies of 1970s British film culture by proposing a model to approach the fragmented film culture of the decade through its historical-cultural preoccupied with boundaries: between pleasure, taste and permission (Harper and Smith, 2012: 7).
[141] Harper and Smith, *British Film Culture in the 1970s*, 228-229.
[142] Harper and Smith, 229, 232.
[143] Harper and Smith, 132.

collaboration which contributed to a coherent visual style and *mise-en-scene* which engaged critically with realism.[144]

The academic legitimisation of British film culture of the 1970s created a suitable environment in which to re-evaluate Russell himself. Beginning in the mid-2000s, academic scholarship about Russell was prompted by two events: firstly, Russell's appearance on *Celebrity Big Brother* (Channel 4, 2001-2010) in 2006; and secondly his death in 2011. In contrast to the foundational literature, the academic revisionism has been structured around edited collections and conferences. Furthermore, it is characterised by a broader consideration of Russell from a number of historical and post-structural approaches.[145] Significantly, historical approaches to Russell have been characterised by archival research conducted at the BBC Written Archives Collection (BBC WAC) which has resulted in a disproportionate focus on Russell's career at the BBC. Alternatively, post-structural approaches have largely been applied to Russell's cinematic career because archival research outside of the BBC has historically been difficult to conduct.

A reputational shift toward a more serious consideration of Russell followed his appearance on *Celebrity Big Brother*. Coinciding with Russell's eightieth birthday in July 2007, the BFI held a comprehensive retrospective of his television films and *Sight and Sound* published an article, written by the scholar Linda Ruth Williams,[146] about him.[147] The first significant edited collection about Russell was compiled by the American scholar Kevin M. Flanagan: *Ken Russell: Re-viewing England's Last Mannerist*.[148] As editor, Flanagan positioned Russell as a cinephile filmmaker, or "cine-mannerist", who used "style to unsettle, defamiliarise or rework many of the representational codes once thought necessary to the production of good art".[149] Here, Flanagan aim was to re-evaluate Russell from historical and theoretical discourses that had not previously been applied to Russell. For example, archival research about Russell's

[144] Haper and Smith, 132.
[145] Significant cultural-historical studies about Russell that are not directly referenced in-text include: Gardiner about *Elgar* and *The Music Lovers* (2003; 2014); Williams about the BBFC censorship of *Women in Love* (2013); Wymer about the production design of *The Devils* (2014); Smith about the production of *Lisztomania* (2014).
[146] It is important to note that Linda Ruth Williams is the partner of the broadcaster and film critic, Mark Kermode. As with Kermode, Williams was a personal friend of Russell. Furthermore, Russell had at one point given Williams permission to write his biography but unfortunately, this never materialised.
[147] Veronica Taylor, 'TV Season: Ken Russell', in *BFI Southbank Programme* (British Film Institute, July 2007); Linda Ruth Williams, 'Ken Russell: Sweet Smell of Excess', *Sight & Sound* (17:7) (2007).
[148] Flanagan, *Ken Russell*.
[149] Flanagan, *Ken Russell*, xiii.

amateur career conducted by Briain Hoyle[150] at the BFI Reuben Library, or *The Debussy Film* by John C. Tibbetts at the BBC WAC,[151] or the adoption of post-structuralist approaches applied to Russell's overlooked later genre films.[152] Significantly, Flanagan reprints Barry Keith Grant's 'The Body Politic: Ken Russell in the 1980s'.[153] Here, it is important to note that Grant argued that Russell's style is similar to that of classical Hollywood[154] melodrama in which the "*mise-en-scène* clearly [is] excessive to the requirements of conventional narrative structure" and "social and political issues become translated into personal and psychoanalytical terms."[155] Additionally, this period also saw significant contributions from Kay Dickinson about Russell and experimental television at the BBC during the 1960s and Russell's composer biographies and the political economy of the 1970s.[156] Regarding Russell's authorial reputation, Dickinson proposed that it was Russell's departure from the previous generations traditional middle-class value-systems, such as critiquing the romantic conceptualisation of the artist, "left Russell on the outside for many years."[157]

After several years of declining health, Russell died on the 27th November 2011 at the age of eighty-four. Subsequently, Russell death has provided the necessary distance from his public persona to be increasingly taken seriously as a legitimate object for academic study. Furthermore, posthumous has been organised around a series of academic conferences: 'Imagining the Past: Ken Russell, biography and the art of making history' (University of

[150] Alongside studies of Russell's amateur career (2009; 2013), Hoyle has written separate studies about Russell's relationship to art cinema (2019) and his collaborations with filmmaker Derek Jarman (2023)

[151] Tibbetts's contribution is adapted from a previous article about *The Debussy Film* (2005). Additionally, Tibbetts has also conducted in-depth archival research about *Elgar* (2006) and written a broad historical overview of Russell's composer films (2008: 155-216).

[152] Brian Hoyle, 'In Defense of the Amateur', in *Ken Russell: Re-Viewing England's Last Mannerist* (Flanagan, ed.) (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2009); John C. Tibbetts, '"Il Parait Que c'etait Un Musicien": Ken Russell's *The Debussy Film'*, in *Ken Russell: Re-Viewing England's Last Mannerist* (Flanagan, ed.) (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2009); John Kenneth Muir, 'As the (White) Worm Turns: Ken Russell as God and Devil of Rubber-Reality Horror Cinema', in *Ken Russell: Re-Viewing England's Last Mannerist* (Flanagan, ed.) (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2009); Thomas Prasch, 'Behind the Last Veil: Forms of Transgression in Ken Russell's *Salome's Last Dance*', in *Ken Russell: Re-Viewing England's Last Mannerist* (Flanagan, ed.) (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2009).

[153] Barry Keith Grant, 'The Body Politic: Ken Russell in the 1980s', in *Ken Russell: Re-Viewing England's Last Mannerist* (Kevin M. Flanagan, ed.) (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2009).

[154] Ian Christie had earlier made the comparison between Russell and classical Hollywood. In his review of Women in Love for Sight & Sound, Christie argued that Russell at the BBC with television biographies could be regarded as "a latter-day genre specialist where, as in the classical genres, the director trades some executive freedom and variety of material for the opportunity to work steadily and often in a narrow vein" (Christie, 1969: 50).

[155] Grant, 'The Body Politic: Ken Russell in the 1980s', 30-31.

[156] Kay Dickinson, '"The Very New Can Only Come from the Very Old": Ken Russell, National Culture and the Possibility of Experimental Television at the BBC in the 1960s', in *Experimental British Television* (Mulvey and Sexton, eds.) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Kay Dickinson, *Off Key: When Film and Music Won't Work Together* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[157] Dickinson, 'The Very New Can Only Come from the Very Old', 75, 86, 87.

Maastricht, Brussels: 2014); 'Ken Russell: Perspectives, Reception and Legacy' (Kingston University, Kingston upon Thames: 2017); '*ReFocus*: The Films of Ken Russell' (Kingston University, Kingston upon Thames: 2023).[158] Furthermore, this posthumous scholarship has increasingly relied on archival research for legitimacy. And here, it is important to note that this thesis is both situated within the context and intervenes with this posthumous scholarship.

The second significant edited collection followed the 'Imagining the Past: Ken Russell, biography and the art of making history' conference which resulted in a special issue of the *Journal of British Cinema and Television* in 2015.[159] This edited collection is significant as it features articles by two different generations of film scholars. Firstly, scholars associated with the establishment of British film studies and British film revisionism, such as John Hill and Julian Petley.[160] And secondly, an emerging generation of scholars with an interest in Russell, such as Kevin M. Flanagan and Christophe Van Eecke.[161] The focus of this issue of the *Journal of British Cinema and Television* is Russell's BBC television biographies and *The Devils*. Subsequently, Van Eecke has continued to write about Russell from a combined historical and post-structuralist approach; moving from Russell and the baroque to Russell as neo-Victorian as subject-matter.[162]

As this thesis is a combined authorial reputation and critical reception study, Hill and Petley provide the most significant articles in the *Journal of British Cinema and Television*. In an

[158] For reference, I presented an outline of my thesis argument at '*ReFocus*: The Films of Ken Russell' (2017). Unfortunately, I had to withdraw from 'Ken Russell: Perspectives, Reception and Legacy'. I had planned to present a paper about references made to Russell in 1970s British popular culture.

[159] Kevin M. Flanagan, 'Imagining the Past: Ken Russell, Biography and the Art of Making History, Cinema RITS, Brussels, 19-20 March 2014', *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media* (7) (Summer 2014); *Journal of British Cinema and Television* (12:4 (2015).

[160] Hill, '"Blurring the Lines between Fact and Fiction": Ken Russell, the BBC and "Television Biography"', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* (12:4) (2015); Julian Petley, 'Witch-Hunt: The Word, the Press and The Devils', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* (12:4) (2015).

[161] Kevin M. Flanagan, 'Ken Russell's Wartime Imagery', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* (12:4) (2015); Christophe Van Eecke, 'Staging the World: *The Devils* as Theatrum Mundi', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* (12:4).

[162] Christophe Van Eecke, 'Moonstruck Follies: *Ken Russell's Salome's Last Dance* (1988) as Baroque Performance', *Image & Narrative* (2:13) (2012); Christophe Van Eecke, 'Pandaemonium: Ken Russell's Artist Biographies as Baroque Performance' (PhD Dissertation, Maastricht University, 2015); Christophe Van Eecke, 'Camp Heritage: Ken Russell's *The Lair of the White Worm* as Neo-Victorian Spectacle', in *Neo-Victorian Humour* (Kohlke and Gutleben, eds.) (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2017); Christophe Van Eecke, 'Phantasmagoria: Ken Russell's *Gothic* as a Neo-Victorian Meta-Heritage Film', *Journal of Neo-Victorian Studies* (21:1) (2019); Christophe Van Eecke, 'Broadcasting the Life and Death of Victorian Cities: Urban Heritage in Ken Russell's Early BBC Shorts, 1959–61', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* (22:1) (2025); Christophe Van Eecke, 'Atavistic Visions: Degeneration and the Return of the Repressed in Ken Russell's *Altered States*', in *Neo-Victorian Decadence Media, Genres, Eras* (Boyiopoulos and Thorne, eds) (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2026).

attempt to legitimise Russell, Hill examines Russell's career at the BBC and argues that Russell's status as a 'special talent' at the BBC had permitted him to overcome institutional tensions but to depart from the BBC's norms of documentary practice pushed institutional boundaries to their limit.[163] This argument will be interrogated in Chapter One of this thesis. And in line with British film revisionism, Petley examined the role sensationalist press articles had in predisposing *The Devils* to censorship. Regarding critical reception, Petley argues that *The Devils* received a uniformly hostile reception because the film failed to conform to the prescribed standards of Ellis's conceptualisation of 'quality' criteria and the critical expectations around historical drama.[164] This argument will be interrogated in Chapter Two of this thesis.[165]

The third significant edited collection followed the 'Ken Russell: Perspective, Reflection and Legacy' conference which eventually resulted in the film scholar Matthew Melia's edited collection: *ReFocus: The Films of Ken Russell*.[166] As a fan-scholar, Melia is central to this final period of revisionist scholarship about Russell. Furthermore, Melia has attempted to redefine Russell through a combination of archival research and a consideration of both his later career as a cult filmmaker and his shadow career of unrealised projects.[167]In *ReFocus: The Films of Ken Russell*, Melia argues that his aim is to challenge the *enfant terrible* and reposition Russell as a "Renaissance Man".[168] Therefore, *ReFocus: The Films of Ken Russell* focuses on further aspects of Russell that have not previously been considered. For example, Russell and television advertising, Russell's collaborations with costume designer Shirley Russell and filmmaker Derek Jarmam, Russell's later novels *Elgar: The Erotic Variations* and *Delius: A*

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[163] John Hill, '"Blurring the Lines between Fact and Fiction": Ken Russell, the BBC and "Television Biography"', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* (12:4) (2015), 453.

[164] Julian Petley, 'Witch-Hunt: The Word, the Press and The Devils', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* (12:4) (2015), 527, 532.

[165] Petley argues that *The Devils* was condemned for 'not being what it never set out to be" or not what a historical drama "should" be (2015: 532). Therefore, it was not a serious or restrained with fully-rounded psychological characters. Moreover, it was excessive: "a particularly damning indictment in the traditional critical lexicon" (2015: 532).

[166] Matthew Melia (ed.), *ReFocus: The Films of Ken Russell* (Edinburgh University Press, 2022).

[167] Matthew Melia, 'Altered States, Altered Spaces: Architecture, Space and Landscape in the Film and Television of Stanley Kubrick and Ken Russell', *Cinergie: Il Cinema e Le Altre Art* (12) (December 2017): 139–52; Matthew Melia, 'Ken Russell's Unfinished Projects and Unmade Films, 1956-1968: The BBC Years', in *Shadow Cinema: The Historical and Production Contexts of Unmade Films* (James Fenwick et al. eds.) (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020); Matthew Melia, 'The Shared History of Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) and Ken Russell's *The Devils* (1971)', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* (42:1) (2022); Matthew Melia, 'Ken Russell's Gothic Modernism', in *ReFocus: The Films of Ken Russell* (Melia, ed.) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022); Matthew Melia, '(Re)Positioning Ken Russell as a Cult Horror *Auteur*', in *Reappraising Cult Horror Films From Carnival of Souls to Last Night in Soho* (Broughton, ed.) (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024).

[168] Matthew Melia, 'Introduction', in *ReFocus: The Films of Ken Russell* (Melia, ed.) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022).

*Moment with Venus* and the reception of Russell in Japan.[169] Lastly, Barry Keith Grant's contribution to the University of Mississippi's long-standing 'Conversation with Filmmakers' series, *Ken Russell: Interviews*, is significant because, as it reprints a number of interviews with Russell, and therefore recirculates an impression of Russell's public persona.[170] And furthermore, it illustrates Russell alternatively embracing and resenting his public persona as *enfant terrible.*

### 1.3. Methodology

This thesis is titled 'Ken Russell: British critical reception and the construction of an authorial reputation' and will examine the development of Ken Russell's reputation as a film and television director. Through Russell, this thesis scrutinises the relationship between criticism and the construction of authorial reputation in British film and television culture; particularly the relationship between the shifting critical boundaries of taste, standards, and values and the changing historical-cultural meaning of films, authors and their work. Furthermore, this thesis argues that developments in British film and television criticism are central to the establishment, construction and development of Russell's authorial reputation, and the establishment and maintenance of Russell's public persona. Particularly, the shift from traditional film criticism to niche film criticism, and the legitimisation of cult film taste and discourse in British film culture.

As a combined film authorship and critical reception study, this thesis is conducted from the interdisciplinary methodological approach of New Film History. New Film History considers film culture to be a site of socio-cultural exchange. It further argues that films are both shaped and determined by historical conditions and cultural discourses. The British film scholars

[169] Richard Farmer, 'Ken Russell and Television Advertising', in *ReFocus: The Films of Ken Russell* (Melia, ed.) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022); NJ Stevenson, 'Shirley Russell and the Role of The Boy Friend in 1970s Retro', in *ReFocus: The Films of Ken Russell* (Melia, ed.) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022); Brian Hoyle, ''No Better Director to Learn From': The Collaboration and Parallel Careers of Ken Russell and Derek Jarman', in *ReFocus: The Films of Ken Russell* (Melia, ed.) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022); Kevin Fullerton, 'Ken Russell and the Sexual Dimension of the Outsider Artist: An Exploration of *Elgar: The Erotic Variations and Delius: A Moment with Venus*', in *ReFocus: The Films of Ken Russell* (Melia, ed.) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022); Sawako Omori, 'A Short History of Ken Russell's Films in Japan', in *ReFocus: The Films of Ken Russell* (Melia, ed.) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022).

[170] Barry Keith Grant (ed.), *Ken Russell: Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2024).

James Chapman, Mark Glancy, and Sue Harper define New Film History as: "historical scholarship that emphasises the critical analysis of primary sources relating to the production and reception of feature films."[171] Furthermore, New Film History is concerned with the expansion of historical analysis through archival research. This encompasses the analysis of hitherto under-researched filmic and non-filmic primary sources in particular.

In New Film History, reception studies represent a principal approach. As a central figure in reception studies, the film historian Janet Staiger has defined reception studies as something different to textual interpretation, as its purpose is to: "understand textual interpretations as they are produced historically" and that "variations among interpretations have historical bases for their differences."[172] A central approach within reception studies itself is the critical reception study. In a critical reception study, ephemera such as promotional material and film reviews are used as a primary source as evidence to analyse the circulation and consumption of films. Particularly, to examine the construction of historical-cultural discourses about cinema and the historical reception and reputation of individual films.

Regarding New Film History, Robert E. Kapsis's *Hitchcock: The Making of a Reputation* and Barbara Klinger's *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture and the Films of Douglas Sirk* are central models in regard to combined film authorship and critical reception studies.[173] Broadly, Kapsis and Klinger examine the historical socio-cultural contexts and critical discourses that structure film reception and shape the construction of authorial reputation. Therefore, their methodological approaches have influenced this examination of the construction, development and maintenance of Ken Russell's authorial reputation.[174]

Both Kapsis and Klinger situate the process of reputation building, in regard to the film director, within the broad shift in critical discourse following the legitimisation of popular culture and the subsequent disciplinisation of film studies. In his study of Alfred Hitchcock's

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[171] James Chapman, Mark Glancy, and Sue Harper (eds)., *The New Film History: Sources, Methods, Approaches* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1.

[172] Staiger, *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), xi.

[173] Kapsis, *Hitchcock*; Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

[174] Other reputational studies consulted as part of this thesis include: Jane Shattuc's *Television, Tabloids, and Tears: Fassbinder and Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), *Lindsay Anderson: Cinema Authorship* (Izod et al. eds.) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019) and Henry K. Miller's *The First True Hitchcock: The Making of a Filmmaker* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022).

authorial reputation, Kapsis identifies that patronage from cultural institutions and intermediaries, media presentation and self-promotion are central to reputation building. And in regard to Hitchcock, the shift in critical discourse with the introduction of *auteurism* permitted the reshaping of his reputation from popular entertainer to serious artist.[175] Here, Kapsis demonstrates that critical consensus in regard to meaning and changing meaning is in accordance with historical-cultural developments.[176] Furthermore, Kapsis highlights that both authorial and critical reputation is also nationally and culturally specific. As referenced in the literature review, Kapsis identifies distinct British and American critical reputations of Hitchcock in relation to the value invested in 'English' and 'American' Hitchcock.

In her study of Douglas Sirk's authorial reputation, Klinger refines Kapsis' methodological approach and stresses that authorial reputation is constructed through historical social and political conditions, the practices of critical institutions and the media, and self-discourse in regard to presentation and publicised intentions.[177] Klinger notes that institutional, cultural, and historical conditions can transform the critical reputation of a director and an understanding of their films.[178] In regard to Sirk, this is, for instance, related to the re-evaluation of film melodrama as a genre during the academic disciplinisation of film studies. Furthermore, Klinger foregrounds that meaning is neither inherent nor fixed. Instead, it is negotiated from competing historical-cultural conditions and processes. Therefore, film authors and individual films have a range of functions and meanings in different historical, cultural and discursive reception contexts.[179]

In following Kapsis' and Klinger's models for analysing reputation-building, this thesis will also consider Howard Becker's concept of the 'art world' and Boris Tomashevsky's concept of the 'biographical legend'.[180] Firstly, reputation management is central to the 'art world' and this is structured around "the collective character of making and consuming art."[181] Therefore, artistic reputation is produced through a collective process of consensus building by cultural institutions and intermediaries, such as critics and academics, who establish particular works

[175] Kapsis, *Hitchcock*, 122.
[176] Kapsis, 5, 7-8.
[177] Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning*, xiii, 7-10.
[178] Klinger, xv.
[179] Klinger, xvii, 34.
[180] Boris Tomashevsky, 'Literature and Biography', in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views* (Ladislav and Pomorska, eds.), (Michigan Slavic Publications, 1978).
[181] Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 351.

as art through formal discrimination.[182] Additionally, artists also anticipate the response of members of the art world and their audience and either cater to existing expectations or attempt to prepare them for new dispositions.[183] Secondly, the 'biographical legend' is an author's self-constructed image and narrative which contributes to their public reputation and influences the reception of their work.[184] Furthermore, Kapsis notes that in regard to the 'biographical legend' within the 'arts world', "a filmmaker with a well-established reputation must manage or take into account that reputation each time he or she is about to release a new film, especially if the film deviates in significant ways from the type of film audiences expect routinely from the director."[185]

Considering both scholars' examination of their respective 'art worlds', a central concern is the function of criticism and the role of the critic.[186] Therefore, their statements about film criticism can be incorporated into analysis of film reviews as a primary source. For example, Klinger identifies ephemera such as promotional material and film criticism share an agenda-setting function and through interpretative frames, outline significant features which establish the vocabulary and terms of discussion that influence the understanding of a film.[187] Additionally, film critics reproduce the cultural distinctions of specific historical moments through strategies such as hierarchies of aesthetic value and canon construction.[188] Similarly, Kapsis identifies that alongside culturally defined standards and intertextual references, critical expectations – around aesthetic and generic conventions, and authorial style and reputation – shape the critical evaluation of films.[189] Furthermore, to deviate from established critical expectations can lead to a negative reception.

Authorial reputation can also be considered an intertext: as it is constructed through a discursive surround of extra-textual material such as promotion, criticism and self-discourse. Regarding the latter, Kapsis and Klinger illustrate that filmmakers actively participate in the

[182] Becker, *Art Worlds*, 351.
[183] Becker, 200.
[184] Boris Tomashevsky, 'Literature and Biography', 47–55.
[185] Kapsis, *Hitchcock,* 42.
[186] As will be illustrated throughout the thesis, Russell's 'art world' refers to the industrial-institutional support from BFI and BBC and producers such as Norman Swallow, Huw Wheldon, Humphrey Burton, John McGrath. And later, Roy Baird, David Puttnam, Melvyn Bragg and Maureen Murray. Furthermore, critical support from publications such as *Amateur Movie Maker* and *Films and Filming*, and critical advocacy from Tony Rose and Gordon Gow, Derek Malcolm, and Mark Kermode.
[187] Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning*, xvi.
[188] Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning,* 70-71.
[189] Kapsis, *Hitchcock*, 12.

creation of their public persona. In regard to the industrial and commercial function of the film director, I will consider Timothy Corrigan's examination of the industrial-commercial adoption of *auteurism*. In 'The Commerce of *Auteurism'*, Corrigan identifies the 'commercial *auteur'* and the 'star-director' who self-promote their constructed image and persona, as an attraction in extra-textual material to privilege themselves as an author, in an attempt to raise and maintain their industrial-commercial status.[190] Furthermore, Janet Staiger considered authorship to be a 'technique of the self', or the repetition of authorial statements, where an individual self-fashions their authorship through citational practice and performance.[191] Moreover, Martin Stollery in his study of the British documentary filmmaker Paul Rotha identifies that filmmakers are central to promoting and diminishing their own reputations. Applicable to Russell, Stollery identifies that contrarianism – such as, making controversial statements – can have a negative reputational impact and limit further career opportunities because it strains relationships with allies within the 'art world'.[192]

Following Alfred Hitchcock as a model, Russell is significant as a British filmmaker because of the performance of his authorship through a public persona. In examining the development of Russell's public persona, it is important to analyse his performance in relation to historical-cultural conditions. Therefore, this thesis will consider Russell's performance of his public persona and its reception in relation to the foregrounding of the film director in popular culture during the 'Long Sixties', and the period of the 'film-director-as-star' during the 1970s. More specifically, Harper and Smith identified a shift in the vocabulary of self-presentation and subjectivity in British culture during the 1970: toward a mannered and knowingness, or ironic disavowal.[193] This thesis will illustrate that this shift in self-presentation influenced the development of Russell's public persona.

In regard to film authorship, this thesis also examines the development of Russell's cult reputation. As indicated in the literature review, Ernest Mathijs and Jamie Sexton propose central paradigms which structure the analysis of cult cinema which will be applied to this thesis. Primarily, that cult reputation of a film or filmmaker increases – alongside, factors such

[190] Timothy Corrigan, *A Cinema Without Walls: Movies and Culture After Vietnam* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 103, 109.
[191] Janet Staiger, 'Authorship Approaches', in *Authorship and Film* (Gerstner and Staiger, eds) (London: Routledge, 2003), 49-51.
[192] Martin Stollery, 'Filmland's Forgotten Man: Paul Rotha and Reputation Studies', *Film History* (3: 3) (Fall, 2019).
[193] Harper and Smith, *British Film Culture in the 1970s*, 88-89.

as the explicit representation of sex and violence – when a film's production and reception circumstances invite comparison to the topicality of controversy and related contemporary cultural discourses such as censorship.[194] In this thesis, this will be seen primarily in relation to *The Devils* and the shift in its cultural status following its re-appraisal as a cult film.

In regard to the cult reputation of film directors, Mathijs and Sexton also note that re-appraisal is principally conducted through *auteurism*. Here, the establishment of a reputation as a 'cult *auteur'*, a combination of the romanticism of classical *auteurism* and the commodified 'film-director-as-star', relies on extra-textual information that cultivates a public persona associated with controversy. As a 'cult *auteur'*, anti-establishment themes within a director's 'biographical legend' are exaggerated as "technical waywardness or scandalous personal details can be perceived as a maverick disregard for the mainstream.[195] Furthermore, Mathijs and Sexton propose that the construction of the 'cult *auteur*' shifts "between the heavily romantic notion of authentic individualism and the more artificial, campy notion of personality as a hyper-exaggerated performance."[196] This is clearly applicable to Russell's performance of his public persona as *enfant terrible*.

In regard to the construction of cult reputations, Mark Jancovich has observed that cult film sensibilities are not a coherent taste culture but rather a series of "contradictory reading strategies that are defined by their sense of their difference to an equally incoherently imagined 'normality'."[197] Additionally, David Andrews had identified several issues in regard to cult statuses that one has to consider in regard to cult reputation. Firstly, cult adversarialism is overemphasised, as cult is not deeply militant in its opposition to either mainstream or art cinema.[198] Secondly, when a film or individual achieves cult status it becomes "detached from their original distribution channels, freeing them to develop new affiliations with more legitimate institutions, including art-cinema institutions."[199]

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[194] Ernest Mathijs, 'The Making of a Cult Reputation: Topicality and Controversy in the Critical Reception of *Shivers*', in *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste* (Jancovich et al. eds.) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 122; Mathijs and Sexton, *Cult Cinema*, 50.
[195] Mathijs and Sexton, *Cult Cinema*, 75.
[196] Mathijs and Sexton, *Cult Cinema*, 69.
[197] Mark Jancovich, 'Cult Fictions: cult movies, subcultural capital and the production of cultural distinctions', *Cultural Studies* (16: 2) (2002), 315.
[198] David Andrews, 'Cult-Art Cinema: defining cult-art ambivalence', in *The Routledge Companion to Cult Cinema* (Mathijs and Sexton, eds.) (London: Routledge, 2019), 34.
[199] Andrews, 'Cult-Art Cinema', 36.

In regard to New Film History, this thesis has been conducted through archival research. Here, it is important to acknowledge that Russell is an elusive figure within the archive. The 'Ken Russell Collection' at Southampton Solent is incomplete.[200] Russell is either dispersed amongst the collections of larger archives or confined to private collections. Primarily, Russell is located within the BBC Written Archives Centre (BBC WAC), the BFI National Archive and the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC).[201] Here, it is also important to recognise that the over-reliance on these archives has contributed to the disproportionate amount of attention paid to Russell's television career at the BBC and the censorship of *The Devils*.

As a combined authorship-reception study, this thesis analyses a combination of print and audio-visual material as primary sources. Primarily, documentation from the BBC WAC related to Russell's institutional status, such as internal memos and correspondences, and ephemera from the BFI National Archive. Particularly, the press articles and film reviews held in the 'Press Clippings Collection' at the BFI Reuben Library and commercially unavailable audio-visual material, such as television appearances, provided by the BFI research viewing service. Regarding these press clippings, it has largely been examined on a film-by-film basis and little attention has been paid to the individual files about Russell himself. Therefore, this thesis will examine this material as a *whole* because it provides a greater sense of the construction of Russell's reputation and the circulation of his persona.[202]

Throughout this thesis, a broad sample of press and critical reception from the trade, specialist and mainstream press will be examined. This encompasses both film and television criticism from trade publications, such as *Kine Weekly* (1959–1971) and *Screen International* (1975- ), specialist publications, such as *Monthly Film Bulletin* and *Films and Filming*, and the 'middlebrow' press. The latter encompassing broadsheet or 'quality' publications, such as *The Times* and *The Guardian*, and tabloid publications, such as *The Daily Mail* (1896- ) and *Daily Mirror* (1903- ).

[200] The 'Ken Russell Collection' at Southampton Solent University was consulted for this thesis. Unfortunately, Russell was unable to make further donations to Solent because a house fire destroyed much of his personal archive in 2006.
[201] Substantial additional material about Russell can also be located in 'Don Boyd Papers' held at the Bill Douglas Centre at the University of Exeter and in the 'Melvyn Bragg Archive' at the University of Leeds.
[202] Russell has one of the largest collections of BFI press clippings of any single individual British filmmaker. This merits research in itself. Additionally, primary sources from private collections supplement this archival material from institutional archives. Particularly, film ephemera.

Regarding the analysis of critical reception, one has to consider Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction*. Here, Bourdieu proposed that cultural distinction is a social construction which reproduces hierarchical class distinctions through the value-laden articulation of legitimate cultural taste. Furthermore, cultural disposition, competence and taste is informed by an individual's 'habitus' – that is, upbringing and education determined by social class – and is structured through the acquisition of 'cultural capital'.[203] Arguably, this has implications for examining British film and television criticism. Particularly, in regard to the cultural-critical positions of publications and the naturalised taste, standards and values of traditional film criticism. For example, the shared middle-class university-educated background of British film and television critics, who are themselves informed by literary criticism, and are concerned with the maintenance of cultural-critical boundaries and standards.

Additionally, this thesis analyses television criticism alongside film criticism. Here, Paul Rixon's examination of British television criticism is instructive. Particularly, Rixon's distinction between serious television criticism and neo-criticism. Rixon identified that in line with established forms of press criticism that applied literary criticism to legitimise their respective mediums, serious television criticism developed in the quality press during the 1950s.[204] As television became the dominant popular medium during the 1960s, a softer form of neo-criticism developed in which television was approached as entertainment.[205] In accordance, neo-critics foregrounded their own personality and experience of watching television: focusing on the biographies of associated talent, the verisimilitude of the script and the performances of the actors.[206] During the 1980s, the expansion of television as a medium and the shift toward niche television audiences saw criticism increasingly take the role of a consumer guide.[207] Furthermore, television criticism became increasingly niche too, as "no single form of reviewing or critical style dominated" and the critics role shifted "to provide opinionated reviews, subjective and personalised comment, to act as a global guide and to provide a post-modern commentary."[208]

[203] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984), 198.
[204] Rixon, *TV Critics and Popular Culture*, 77, 81.
[205] Rixon, 57, 101-130.
[206] Rixon, 58.
[207] Rixon, 8, 62.
[208] Rixon, 62.

I am also aware that as a piece of historical scholarship based on archival research, which is analysing critical reception as primary source, that historical reconstruction itself is a highly mediated process of selection and interpretation. Regarding critical reception, Janet Staiger has identified that using the film review as a primary source: "is subject to the problem of retrieval, as well as language, schemata or representation of the subject that mediate perception, comprehension and interpretation."[209]

Here, Raymond Williams's interrelated concepts of the 'structure of feeling' and 'selective tradition' is useful in understanding this process. Williams proposed that a 'structure of feeling' is the lived culture of a historical period, or common experience of a generation. [210] After a 'structure of feeling' has left living memory, it is reconstructed through its material culture that subsequently requires interpretation. Beginning in the historical period itself, cultural institutions and intermediaries engage within an active process called the 'selective tradition' where, under specific historical conditions and perspectives, "from the whole body of activities, certain things are selected for value and emphasis."[211]

And while some of this has been addressed in the literature review, I am acutely aware that I need to interrogate established assumptions about British film and television criticism and Ken Russell's authorial reputation throughout the thesis. Therefore, I propose a series of research questions that will structure my approach to conducting research in British film and television criticism and writing about the development of Russell's authorial reputation and public persona.

Regarding British film and television criticism, research questions include: what is the role of British cultural institutions and intermediaries in the construction of authorial reputation? In British film and television criticism, how do critical taste and critical discourse contribute to the construction of authorial reputation? Here, what critical standards and hierarchies of aesthetic-moral values are used in critical evaluation? And, have critical taste, standards and values shifted over time and how has this effected authorial reputation?

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[209] Janet Staiger, *Interpreting Films*, 214

[210] Alan O' Connor, *Raymond Williams: Writing, Culture, Politics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 85, 104.

[211] Raymond Williams, 'The Analysis of Culture' (1971), in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* (Storey, ed.) (London: Routledge, 1994).

Regarding the authorial reputation of Ken Russell, research questions include: what is Russell's authorial reputation and public persona? How did Russell's authorial reputation develop? What role did cultural institutions and intermediaries have in the construction of Russell's reputation? How did Russell's reputation and persona respond to shifting historical, cultural, and discursive factors? And finally, what is the significance of Russell in British film and television history?

### 1.4. Thesis Structure

This thesis is composed of three chapters structured around significant moments and themes in the establishment, construction and development of Ken Russell's authorial reputation in Britain. Specifically, the establishment of an artistic reputation as an exceptional talent as an amateur filmmaker during the 1950s and the development of this reputation as a writer-director at the BBC during the 1960s; the development of a popular reputation and public persona which fixed as an *enfant terrible* because of controversy at the beginning of the 1970s; and critical rehabilitation through the development of a cult reputation from the 1980s onwards.

In Chapter One, I will examine the establishment of Russell's authorial reputation as an amateur filmmaker in the late 1950s and the development of this reputation as a professional filmmaker at the BBC during the 1960s. During this period, Russell developed both an artistic reputation as an amateur and television writer-director and a contrasting popular reputation. Therefore, Chapter One consists of three sections: the establishment of Russell's artistic reputation as an 'exceptional amateur', the development of Russell's artistic reputation as the 'television-director-as-artist' through the dramatisation of documentary, and the development of Russell's popular reputation combined with the establishment of a popular persona as the 'Wild Man of the BBC'.

Chapter One is informed by the established scholarship about Russell's amateur and television career. Particularly, Brian Hoyle's study of Russell's amateur career and the studies of Russell's career at the BBC by Kay Dickinson and John Hill. Regarding the construction and development of Russell's authorial reputation, I will analyse the repeated statements and themes in the critical reception of the amateur film *Amelia and the Angel* and the television biographies: *Elgar*, *The Debussy Film* and *Song of Summer*.

This chapter intervenes in the established scholarship as it considers the relationship between Russell's critical reputation and his institutional status. Here, I will argue that Russell's authorship and the development of an artistic reputation was advanced as part of broader institutional and critical strategies for legitimisation. Primarily, amateur filmmaking as legitimate practice and television as legitimate medium for artistic expression. Therefore, I will analyse the institutional-critical construction of Russell as presented in the under-examined television retrospective: 'The Ken Russell Festival' (BBC One, 25 June – 16 July 1968). Furthermore, I will also analyse the relationship between Russell's television biographies' increasing association with cultural permissiveness and the development of his popular reputation – especially in the establishment of a discursive tension between Russell's artistic and popular reputation.

In Chapter Two, I will analyse the development of Russell's authorial reputation and public persona as he crossed over from television into commercial cinema at the beginning of the 1970s. During this period, the negative critical reception and controversy that surrounded the transmission of *Dance of the Seven Veils*, an experimental biography of the composer Richard Strauss, and the release of *The Devils*, an unconventional film adaptation of Aldous Huxley's *The Devils of Loudon*, undermined Russell's established artistic reputation. Here, Russell became firmly associated with authorial self-indulgence and excess, and the intention to shock and controversy. And as result, Russell obtained a reputation as an *enfant terrible*.

In this chapter, I will analyse the negative critical and institutional reception of *Dance of the Seven Veils*, *The Devils* and Russell's contrarian appearance on the late-night magazine television programme *24 Hours* (BBC One, 22 July 1971).[212] Primarily, in the development of Russell's popular reputation with the establishment of his authorial persona as an *enfant terrible*. Historically, *Dance of the Seven Veils* and *The Devils* have been analysed separately because of the 'television-film' distinction that has been constructed around Russell.[213] Furthermore, Russell's appearance on *24 Hours* – where he assaulted the film critic Alexander Walker – has been much repeated as an anecdote but has received little scrutiny. Therefore, I

[212] Though the discourse of censorship is central to Chapter Three, this thesis does not aim to recount the censorship history of *The Devils* in the United Kingdom. This has been well-covered elsewhere.

[213] The 'television-film' distinction in discourse around Russell is *auteurist* and was largely established in the foundational literature.

aim to intervene in the established scholarship through analysing their cumulative reputational impact.

Both chapters aim to challenge presumptions around the critical reception of Russell's film and television work. Particularly, the presumption that Russell received outright critical condemnation with *Dance of the Seven Veils* and *The Devils*. Rather, critical hostility towards was primarily structured around the taste and values of traditional criticism. Regarding traditional criticism, a set of critical expectations about Russell were established during the 1960s. These critical expectations centered around artistic-moral responsibility and concerned the appropriateness of Russell's approach, style and tone for serious subject-matter and themes. Regarding negative critical reception, Russell was compared to his artistic reputation as a television writer-director and was considered to have failed in meeting the critical expectations established with this reputation. Primarily, Russell was considered to have departed from the romanticism and restraint of his television biographies with the development of a self-indulgent anachronistic 'savage approach' that incorporated burlesque, excess and graphic imagery. Furthermore, Russell's reputation and persona became a feature in the critical reception itself. And following *Dance of the Seven Veils* and *The Devils*, the *enfant terrible* comes to define subsequent critical expectations about Russell.

In Chapter Three, I will examine aspects of Russell's later career. Specifically, the decline of Russell's critical reputation, reputational self-maintenance through the performance of his authorial persona as an *enfant terrible*, and the development of his cult reputation during the 1980s and 1990s. Particularly, in relation to the development of niche film criticism and the subsequent shift towards a more personalised mode of critical taste, standards and values. This chapter is examined from the contemporaneous critical position that Russell had not matured as an artist. Here, his artistic reputation and talent was considered to have diminished; including his ability to shock.

This chapter is more thematic than the previous chapters and intervenes in established scholarship because Russell's later career is rarely examined. Firstly, this chapter will concern Russell's return to British cinema in mid-1980s and D. H. Lawrence as source material. In relation reputational decline and shifting critical tone, I will analyse the critical reception of *Gothic*, a horror film about the conception of *Frankenstein*, and the negative critical reception of his adaptations of Lawrence's *The Rainbow* (Ken Russell, 1989) and *Lady Chatterley* (BBC

One, 1993). These adaptations were considered to neither replicate the artistic quality and high critical standard established with Russell's adaptation of Lawrence's *Women in Love* nor meet the popular reputations of Lawrence as permissive and Russell as *enfant terrible*.

Secondly, this chapter will examine Russell 'playing-up' to maintain public visibility as his career declined through his flamboyant and contrarian public persona as *enfant terrible*. Therefore, I will analyse instances of Russell performing the *enfant terrible* in the documentaries he made for *The South Bank Show* (London Weekend Television, 1978-2010) and related media appearances. This section will foreground that during this period; Russell was evaluated against his public persona and this contributed to a reluctance to take him seriously.

Thirdly, I will examine the development of Russell's cult reputation, that was constructed from his reputation as *enfant terrible*, as he returned to amateur filmmaking during the late-1990s. Specifically, the romanticised re-appraisal of Russell from an *auteurist* perspective by a new generation of critics and scholars who were fans. During this re-appraisal, critics and fan-scholars negotiated between: elevating Russell as a serious filmmaker and re-evaluating his films defensively with seriousness; and elevating Russell as a cult filmmaker and finding pleasure in bad taste. In line with British cult film sensibilities, both positions foregrounded Russell's association with the horror genre and transgressiveness alongside Russell's established association with controversy, censorship and excess. Therefore, I will analyse the re-categorisation of *The Devils* as a horror film. Here, shifting critical discourse is represented as *The Devils* was initially received as a literary adaptation and a historical drama. It could be argued that this cult reputation subsequently obfuscates a historical understanding of Russell.

As seen in this introduction, it is important to conclude here that the 'Long Sixties' is a significant theme throughout this thesis. This periodisation of cultural redefinition underlines the development of British film and television criticism, disciplinisation of film studies and the establishment and development of Russell's authorial reputation. For example, Chapter One concerns the legitimisation of television as medium, the liberalisation of public service broadcasting and expansion of arts programming. Chapter Two addresses the discourse around the limits of cultural, medium and representational permissiveness. And Chapter Three, the subsequent selective reinterpretation of the 1960s and the discourse of permissiveness for contemporary use.

## 2. From Amateur to Professional: Ken Russell and the construction of authorial reputation during the 1950s and 1960s

During the 1950s and 1960s, Ken Russell was a significant figure in both amateur filmmaking and television arts programming. Therefore, this chapter examines the establishment and development of Ken Russell's authorial and critical reputation as an amateur filmmaker in the late 1950s and as a professional filmmaker at the BBC during the 1960s. Specifically, the critical establishment of Russell's artistic reputation as an amateur filmmaker, the institutional development of his artistic and popular reputations as a freelance writer-director at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and the establishment of a public persona.

Firstly, this chapter will analyse the establishment and construction of Ken Russell's artistic reputation as an amateur filmmaker with the short film *Amelia and the Angel* (Ken Russell, 1958). Specifically, the foregrounding of Russell in publications such as *Sight & Sound* and *Amateur Movie Maker* (1957-1964) and the construction of him as an 'exceptional talent' will be investigated.

Secondly, this chapter will examine the development of Ken Russell's artistic institutional-critical reputation, referred henceforth as institutional-critical reputation, as a freelance writer-director for the television arts series: *Monitor* (BBC Television, 1958-1965) and *Omnibus* (BBC Television, 1967-2003). Especially, the construction of Russell as the 'television-director-as-artist' in relation to the dramatisation of documentary on television with the development of television biography. Here, Russell is considered to have pushed institutional boundaries surrounding historical and biographical representation: primarily, through a series of increasingly impressionistic and interpretative biographies of artists and composers that were regarded as artistic and technical achievements. Such as, for instance, the romantic: *Elgar: Portrait of a Composer* (BBC Television, 11 November 1962) and *A Song of Summer* (BBC One, 15 September 1968).

And thirdly, this chapter will examine the development of Ken Russell's popular reputation as he crossed-over from television into commercial cinema. In this regard, the analysis will focus on Russell's increasing association with cultural permissiveness, critical divisiveness and waywardness as well as the establishment of his public persona as 'The Wild Man of the BBC'.

As stated in the Thesis Introduction, both this and the following chapter cover the period of social and cultural change characterised by Arthur Marwick as the 'Long Sixties': a transitional period between 1958 and 1974 which saw the redefinition of cultural distinctions with the blurring of cultural boundaries between elite and popular culture, and the emergence of new cultural sensibilities: primarily, through middle-class cultural values.[214] In this chapter, the representatives of this cultural shift include: the development of television of criticism and the cultural legitimisation of the medium as art; the liberalisation of the BBC under the Director-General Hugh Carleton Greene and the expansion of arts programming; and formal experimentation considering the development of dramatised documentary. The latter challenged institutional and generic boundaries around the distinction and blurring of fact and fiction, authorial interpretation and documentary impartiality.

Throughout this chapter, emphasis will also be placed on the romantic concept of the author. Throughout this period, the cultural distinction of the romantic author was used to legitimise aspects of popular culture – especially popular cinema through the film director. Therefore, this chapter will scrutinise how Ken Russell's authorial reputation was used in wider cultural strategies of medium, institutional and critical legitimisation. Specifically, in relation to authorial reputation being constructed through a combination of institutional and critical support and through self-discourse. Furthermore, this chapter sets out to argue that Russell's institutional-critical reputation was used to legitimise amateur filmmaking as a cultural practice, television as a medium and television criticism as a critical practice, and to distinguish the BBC as a public service broadcaster. Additionally, this chapter argues that Russell's institutional and critical reputation allowed him to crossover into professional filmmaking as well as to crossover from television into commercial cinema.

[214] Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, 1958-1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5-7.

## 2.1. *Amelia and the Angel* (Ken Russell, 1958): the establishment of Ken Russell's authorial reputation as an 'exceptional talent'

Ken Russell's amateur reputation was established on the short film *Amelia and the Angel* and constructed as an 'exceptional talent'. This construction was enabled through institutional and critical support. Here, specialist film publications such as *Sight & Sound* and *Amateur Movie Maker* (1957-1964) foregrounded Russell's authorship as a part of a wider institutional-critical strategy to legitimise the BFI Experimental Film Fund and amateur filmmaking as a cultural practice.

The practice and reputation of Ken Russell as a professional filmmaker was established on the practice and reputation he obtained as an amateur filmmaker. In the 1950s, Russell had a brief but successful career as a professional photographer and was noted for a series of stylised photo-essays published in *Illustrated* (1934-1958) and *Picture Post* (1938-1957).[215] Considering the demise of *Illustrated* and *Picture Post*, Russell saw little prospect in continuing a career in photojournalism. Instead, he decided to pursue a long-held desire to be a professional filmmaker.[216] During this period, the conservatism of the British film industry and its reluctance to establish professional training opportunities created barriers for emerging talent to enter the industry.[217] Therefore, Russell decided to draw upon his experience as a professional photographer and pursue amateur filmmaking as a route to professional employment.

As an amateur filmmaker, Ken Russell completed three short films: *Peepshow* (Ken Russell, 1956), *Amelia and the Angel* and *Lourdes* (Ken Russell, 1958).[218] Russell's reputation as an amateur filmmaker was constructed around *Amelia and the Angel* through a combination of

[215] Following brief careers in ballet and repertory theatre, Russell re-trained as a photographer at Walthamstow Technical College. As a photographer, Russell is noted for a series of photographs of Teddy Girls and can be considered a contemporary of David Hurn: whom Russell profiled in *House in Bayswater* (BBC, 26 August 1960) and *Watch the Birdie* (BBC, 9 June 1963). In *The British Journal of Photography*, David Mitchell – former editor of the photographic agency, Pictorial Press – believed Russell's style to be fully formed and accomplished enough to recommend him to Magnum Photos (Mitchell: 1990). Additional information about Russell's photographic career can be found in Sutton (2012).

[216] A repeated anecdote in Russell's biographical self-discourse is that the only encouragement Russell received in trying to enter the film industry after he was demobbed from Royal Air Force in 1948 was from Michael Powell, who suggested to find employment in a photographic stills department (Baxter: 1973; 79-80).

[217] Duncan Petrie and Rod Stoneman, *Educating Filmmakers: Past, Present and Future* (Bristol: Intellect Press, 2014), 90.

[218] Russell first amateur film, *Knights on a Bike* (Ken Russell, 1956) was abandoned uncompleted.

institutional and critical support. Inspired by *The Red Balloon* (Albert Lamorisse, 1956), *Amelia and the Angel* was prompted by Russell's conversion to Catholicism and concerned a young girl called Amelia (Mercedes Quadros) who searches for a pair of replacement wings for her dance recital.[219]

*Amelia and the Angel* received institutional support The Catholic Film Society and the British Film Institute (BFI). The BFI's supported *Amelia and Angel* through the BFI Experimental Film Fund (1952-1963) which had been established to support emerging talent. During this period, the BFI Experimental Film Fund sponsored the Free Cinema Movement (1956-1959): a group of documentarists organised by critic and filmmaker Lindsay Anderson and included Karel Reisz and Tony Richardson.[220] Regarding *Amelia and the Angel*, the BFI Experimental Film Fund provided a retrospective grant to complete post-production sound.

Despite the success of the Free Cinema Movement, the BFI Experimental Film Fund was a contentious issue in critical discourse. Michael Balcon, Chairman of the Fund who had a reputation for nurturing talent when he was Chairman of Ealing Studios,[221] responded to an editorial in *Films and Filming* that criticised both the professional and experimental credentials of films the BFI Experimental Film Fund had supported.[222] Defending the BFI Experimental Film Fund, Balcon stated that some of the amateurs that the BFI Experimental Film Fund had supported had subsequently gained professional employment within the film industry. In his response, Balcon mistook Russell for a professional cinematographer.[223]

Prompted by this exchange in *Films and Filming*, Ken Russell wrote to Balcon to correct the record and request professional advice:

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[219] *Amelia and the Angel* illustrates the influence of the BFI sanctioned post-war Film Societies Movement with its clear debt to German Expressionism, Soviet Montage, French Poetic Realism, and the short film *The Pleasure Garden* (James Broughton, 1953).

[220] Russell later disavowed the BFI Experimental Film Fund in *The Daily Telegraph*: "the BFI saw it at the dubbing stage, lent me £100 at enormous interest to finish it off and have been wallowing in the glory ever since" (Russell: 1972: 14). And in retrospect, Russell deprecated the Free Cinema Movement: "they received free handouts from the BFI" (Russell: 1993: 81).

[221] In 1958, there were no professional opportunities at Ealing Studios with the release of a final prestige film, *Dunkirk* (Leslie Norman, 1958). Moreover, in line with television becoming the dominant popular medium, the Ealing studio lot was sold to the BBC in 1955 (i.e., re-locating to MGM-Borehamwood) and former personnel were absorbed into the BBC; including the editor Allan Tyrer who contributed to the success of *Monitor*. Russell also came to film extensively on the Ealing Studio lot while at the BBC.

[222] Anon, 'What We Think: Wrong Way to Experiment', *Films and Filming* (4:10) (July 1958), 16.

[223] Michael Balcon, 'What You Think', *Films and Filming* (4:11) (August 1958), 3.

> One of your statements is, however (unfortunately for me) not entirely correct. You list a number of films and then follow it with 'all made, incidentally by professionals or by young men and women who have since become professional' […] My film *Amelia and the Angel* is among those you mention but I, alas, am still a despised amateur I want to make films professionally and I should like to find a place in the film industry but without contacts this seems to me at times to be an almost hopeless ambition.[224]

An early indication of Ken Russell's contrarianism, the self-assessment as a "despised amateur" was challenged in the institutional-critical positioning of *Amelia and the Angel* and the foregrounding of Russell's authorial talent.

Firstly, the 'despised amateur' is challenged in production notes prepared by the distributor Contemporary Film for the publicity brochure of *Amelia and the Angel*. Here, Ken Russell is described as an individual who "demonstrates his mastery over the transition from still photography to the medium of cinema."[225] Secondly, Russell's authorial talent is foregrounded in the BFI publication: *Sight and Sound*. In the article 'Amateur Status', Derek Hill – the co-editor of *Amateur Cine-World* (1934-1967) – challenged the use of amateur as a pejorative term associated with low technical standards and a lack of quality. Here, Hill designates Amelia *and the Angel* as: "the most successful amateur production made in this country."[226] Principally, Hill legitimises amateur film practice through the distinction of authorship and argued *Amelia and the Angel* represented "the emergence of an exhilarating unknown talent."[227]

Alongside institutional support from the BFI, the critical support of *Amateur Movie Maker* and its successor *Movie Maker* were central to the construction of Ken Russell's amateur reputation. Founded in 1957, Hill described *Amateur Movie Maker* as having *"*an awareness of its responsibility in suggesting directions open to the amateur filmmaker."[228] One direction for Tony Rose, editor of *Amateur Movie Maker*, was to legitimise both the publication and amateur film practice through the distinction of authorship. In '*Amelia* Restores My Faith', Rose appraised *Amelia and the Angel* as "amateur film of the year" and described the film as

[224] Letter from Ken Russell to Sir Michael Balcon (28 August 1958), British Film Institute Special Collections (Box N/28).
[225] Contemporary Films, '*Amelia and the Angel*', Production Notes, BFI press clippings.
[226] Derek Hill, 'Amateur Status', *Sight and Sound* (27:5) (1958), 255.
[227] Hill, 'Amateur Status' 255.
[228] Hill, 255.

"the nearest approach to a masterpiece that any amateur has yet made."[229] Moreover, Rose distinguished *Amelia and Angel* as an amateur short film in assigning Russell authorship: "Russell can lay fair claim to *Amelia and the Angel* as a one-man production".[230] Furthermore, Rose described *Amelia and the Angel* as having: "the kind of imaginative truth that makes much of the candid camerawork and 'social realism' of the Free Cinema school seem self-conscious and faintly phoney."[231]

Significantly, *Amateur Movie Maker* allowed Ken Russell to assert his directorial choices and authorial intentions in the accompanying article: 'How I made *Amelia and the Angel*'.[232] Similarly, the Federation of Film Societies magazine *Film* (1954-2003) also allowed Russell to illustrate his creative approach in the article 'Ideas for Film'.[233] This article also established Russell's biographical narrative that would be embellished throughout his career:

> Ken Russell, now in his early thirties, is married with two children. His wife, Shirley, plays the lead in *Peep Show* (on the cover). A freelance still photographer, he worked for *Illustrated* and before this was a midshipman, a ballet dancer, airman, actor, teacher and film extra. […] He is passionately fond of music, ballet, books (especially children's books) and films. [234]

Additionally, Ken Russell expresses a contrarian voice in the article: "Many amateur films one sees appear to have been built on an illogical idea or one that is half-formed or undeveloped or fifth-rate or second-hand. And if it is second-hand, it usually manages to be fifth-rate as well". [235] Subsequently, Russell discussed amateur film practice alongside Tony Rose on BBC Radio Three's *Photography and Cinematograph*.[236]

Regarding the construction of authorial reputation, it is also important to highlight that Ken Russell's other completed amateur short films, *Peepshow* and *Lourdes*, were not as well-received as *Amelia and the Angel*. Russell's first amateur film *Peepshow*, was considered by

[229] Tony Rose, '*Amelia* Restores My Faith', *Amateur Movie Maker* (1:8) (1958), 242.
[230] Rose, '*Amelia* Restores My Faith'', 243.
[231] Rose, 244.
[232] Ken Russell, 'How I Made *Amelia and the Angel*', *Amateur Movie Maker* (1:8) (1958), 245.
[233] Ken Russell, 'Ideas for Films', *Film* (January 1959), 13.
[234] Russell, 'Ideas for Films', 13.
[235] Russell, 15.
[236] 'Photography and Cinematography', *The Other End of the Camera* (BBC Network Three, 21/07/1958),

John Turner in *Film* to be a "film fantasy [that] palls badly".[237] And Russell's first documentary and first colour film, *Lourdes* – sponsored by Aer Lingus and The Catholic Film Society – was considered by Harold Benson of *Amateur Movie Maker* to be too self-conscious in technique "rather than letting the scenes prompt their own style".[238] Additionally reviewers in *Film News*, the Federation of Film Societies newsletter, were divided over the film's excesses: either the "the marriage of a theatrical style to a nobly theatrical subject" or "contempt for feeling and good taste".[239] This critical divisiveness anticipates the critical reception of Russell for the rest of his career.

These articles and reviews also established critical conventions and themes that would be circulated and referenced throughout the rest of Ken Russell's professional career. These include, for example, Russell was a single-author and 'exceptional talent', that Russell had an identifiable style as a filmmaker that was concerned with technique and the correspondence between image and music, and that there was a correlation between Russell's biography and thematic motifs in his work – particularly, in regard to Catholicism, professional failure and the relationship between reality and fantasy. [240]

It is clear that the institutional-critical support *Amelia and the Angel* received contributed to the legitimisation of both the BFI Experimental Film Fund – that is, alongside contemporary productions in the Free Cinema Movement – and wider amateur filmmaking as a cultural practice. Institutional support enabled a screening of *Amelia and the Angel* at the National Film Theatre (11 May 1958) and throughout films societies nationwide. Moreover, *Amelia and the Angel* was screened at various international film festivals to gain prestige such as, for example, Brussels International Experimental Film Competition (April 1958) and Cork Amateur Film Festival (August 1958), where it was awarded first prize.

[237] John Turner, '*Peepshow'*, *Federation of Film Societies: Film News* (33) (March 1958), 12.
[238] Harold Benson, 'The Statues Spring to Life', *Amateur Movie Maker* (1:15) (1958), 638–39.
[239] J. L. Eyre, '*Lourdes'*, *Federation of Film Societies: Film News* (33) (March 1958), 10; Roy Nichols, '*Lourdes'*, *Federation of Film Societies: Film News* (33) (March 1958), 10.
[240] In *Screen International*, Oswald Blakeston reflected on an interview he conducted with Russell when he was a stills photographer in 1954. Here, Blakestone states Russell was developing his philosophy behind the visual shock: "It's the little bit of outrage which makes things stand out in real life. […] When I make up my fantasies, they're no more artificial than the shocks of life. […] A conventional pose in a conventional background works against awareness" (1977).

In terms of critical support, Rose continued to promote Ken Russell in *Amateur Movie Maker* and its successor *Movie Maker*.[241] To coincide with Russell's amateur films being profiled in *The Short Makers* (ATV Network Limited, 9 April 1967), a television series about filmmakers who began their careers as amateurs, Rose described *Amelia in the Angel* in *Movie Maker* as to have "combined technical skill with a special flair for the kind of visual fantasy that was later to characterise his films" and that "everything [he] has done professionally stems from one or the other of his three amateur films."[242] It is important to note that Brian Hoyle has identified that Russell did *not* distance himself from his amateur beginnings. Instead, throughout his career, he deliberately continued to incorporate amateur principles and practices and later returned to amateur filmmaking in the late 1990s.[243]

In conclusion, the critical success of *Amelia and the Angel* established certain critical discourses and expectations such as, primarily, foregrounding Ken Russell's authorship, establishing a biographical narrative and authorial themes, as well as inscribing the notion of talent. It was the latter in particular that subsequently became central to critical evaluation and assessments of Russell. Moreover, the establishment of Russell's artistic reputation as an 'exceptional talent' allowed him to crossover from amateur to professional filmmaking at the BBC. Furthermore, the legitimisation of amateur practice was reinforced in Russell crossing-over into professional filmmaking.

## 2.2. ***Monitor*** **(BBC Television, 1958-1965): public service broadcasting and the distinction of television arts programming**

Throughout the 1960s, Ken Russell developed an artistic reputation as a freelance writer-director at the BBC. Here, the relationship between increasing critical reputation and rising institutional status was central to the development of Russell's reputation as the 'television-director-as-artist'. This reputation built on Russell's institutional-critical reputation as an

[241] Tony Rose, 'Wide-Awake Dream Merchant', *Movie Maker* (1:9) (November 1967); Tony Rose, '*The Music Lovers*, the Film in Which Ken Russell Meets Tchaikovsky', *Movie Maker* (5:5) (May 1971); Tony Rose, 'Ken Russell's Musical Merry-Go-Round', *Movie Maker* (6:4) (April 1972); Tony Rose, 'On Set with Ken Russell', *Movie Maker* (6:9) (September 1972).
[242] Rose, 'Wide-Awake Dream Merchant', 666.
[243] Brian Hoyle, 'Start as You Mean to Go On': Ken Russell's Early Amateur Films'', in *Small-Gauge Storytelling: Discovering the Amateur Fiction Film* (Craven and Shand, ed.) (Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 201.

amateur and was constructed around medium and generic innovation in arts programming through his contribution to the dramatisation of documentary on television. As previously mentioned, this included a notable series of increasingly romantic and impressionistic biographies of artists and composers. Furthermore, Russell's artistic reputation was employed as part of both a critical strategy for medium legitimisation as well as an institutional strategy for distinction and prestige.

The introduction and development of arts programming can be considered as an exemplary institutional strategy for distinction. During the 1960s and into the 1970s, television in the United Kingdom established itself as a distinct medium from radio broadcasting. The expansion and development of television as a medium intensified after the introduction of Independent Television (ITV) in 1955. The competition that resulted from the initial popularity of commercial television and cultural anxiety over its programming – particularly, light entertainment, game shows and American imports – led the BBC to pursue institutional distinction and medium innovation through arts programming.[244]

The Pilkington Committee on Broadcasting report, published in 1962 prior to the renewal of the BBC charter and the ITV franchise licenses, criticised the triviality of ITV's programming and stated that as it was the duty of public service broadcasters to "provide a service comprehensive character; one which will inform, educate and entertain".[245] Furthermore, the Pilkington Report stated that the BBC was able to influence societal standards and values through "the range of subject matter treated and the variety of treatment, [and] the broadcaster developed the possibilities of the medium and increased its value."[246]

The Pilkington Report's conception of public service broadcasting, to "inform, educate and entertain", referenced the public service broadcasting ethos of the BBC's first Director-General John Reith to "carry into the greatest possible number of homes everything that is the best in every department of human achievement."[247] This ethos reproduced the institutionalisation of the Victorian middle-classes sense of social responsibility and moral reformation through

[244] Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume 5: Competition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 1005.
[245] Harry Pilkington, *The Future of Sound Radio and Television: Summary of the Report of the Committee on Broadcasting* (Cmnd no. 1753) (HMSO, 1962), 7.
[246] Pilkington, *The Future of Sound Radio and Television: Summary of the Report of the Committee on Broadcasting*, 11.
[247] John Charles Walsham Reith, *Broadcast Over Britain* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1924), 34.

culture; represented by Matthew Arnold's imperialistic definition of culture as "the best that has been known and thought in the world."[248] Moreover, the Reithian ethos and Arnoldian cultural values influenced subsequent management at the BBC to lead public taste.

Coinciding with the Pilkington Committee was the appointment of Hugh Carleton Greene as Director-General of the BBC. Greene's directorship of the BBC from 1960 to 1969 marked the redefinition of the public service broadcasting as a response to contemporary redefinitions of culture; the Reithian ethos became increasingly difficult to accommodate. Carlton Greene envisioned a liberal conception of public service broadcasting whereby an "organisation must recognise an obligation towards tolerance and towards the maximum liberty of expression" and argued the current role of the BBC was to "encourage the examination of views and opinions in an attitude of healthy scepticism".[249] Moreover, Greene's liberal redefinition of public service broadcasting encouraged institutional distinction through art programming and permitted increasing experimentation on television.

The BBC addressed its deficit in arts programming in the creation of *Monitor*. *Monitor* was developed by Catherine Freeman of the BBC Talks Department as a fortnightly Sunday evening arts magazine programme in response to the current affairs programmes: *Tonight* (BBC Television, 1957-1965) and *Panorama* (BBC Television, 1957- ). Edited and presented by Huw Wheldon, *Monitor* was first broadcast on BBC Television on 2nd February 1958. And while *Monitor* represented the Reithian ethos of public service broadcasting and the expression Arnoldian cultural values, it extended in line with Carlton Greene and incorporated popular culture.

Consequently, the expansion of television programming and the need for distinct programming to compete with commercial television was permitted by increasing television ownership and the increased revenue generated from the sale of television licenses.[250] This increased revenue afforded opportunities for emerging talent to enter professional filmmaking. This allowed

[248] Matthew Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' (1864), in *Essays in Criticism* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1865), 13.
[249] Hugh Carleton Greene, *The Third Floor: A View of Broadcasting in the Sixties* (London: Bodley Head, 1969), 94.
[250] Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom,* 1005.

individuals such as John Schlesinger,[251] Ken Russell, and Peter Watkins[252] to crossover from amateur to professional filmmaking.[253]

In 1959, Ken Russell was hired by Huw Wheldon, who was searching for a replacement for John Schlesinger, on the recommendation of Norman Swallow; the Assistant Head of BBC Television.[254] Russell was employed by the BBC on a freelance basis and made his first professional film for *Monitor*, a short documentary profile of the poet John Betjeman titled: *John Betjeman: A Poet in London* (BBC Television, 1 March 1959).[255] Following transmission, *Monitor's* Associate Producer Nancy Thomas anticipated Carlton Greene's liberal redefinition of public service broadcasting, and Russell's formal innovation, in describing *A Poet in London* as: "an experiment in using him [Russell] as a film director and as an experiment in filming poetry."[256]

As indicated, Ken Russell's early short films for *Monitor* represent the move toward the liberal redefinition of public service broadcasting. Russell had trained as a photographer at Walthamstow Technical College, and this art school background informed an approach to elite culture that incorporated popular culture and blurred the distinction between high and low art. Russell's early short films for *Monitor* focused on music, dance and living artists who were outsiders to established British culture. Dickinson argues this populist approach, a "comfortable strain of non-conformity", brought elite culture into the domestic environment and drew social classes and their tastes into alignment through an amalgam of references and connotations across cultural taxonomies.[257] This is illustrated in *Pop Goes the Easel* (BBC Television, 25 March 1962): a documentary profile of the Pop Artists Peter Blake, Derek

[251] Following the amateur film *Sunday in the Park* (John Schlesinger, 1956) and prior to his film career, Schlesinger made several critically acclaimed films for *Monitor* including *The Circus* (BBC TV, 02/02/1958), *Hi-Fi-Fo-Fum* (BBC TV, 12/04/1959) and *The Class* (BBC TV, 9/04/1961).

[252] Peter Watkins also received institutional support from the BFI Experimental Film Board for *Forgotten Faces* (Peter Watkins, 1961) and critical support from *Amateur Movie Maker* for *Forgotten Faces* and the earlier, *Diary of an Unknown Soldier* (Peter Watkins, 1959).

[253] In the foundational literature, Russell repeatedly states that *Monitor* was at the time an "experimental film school" (Baxter, 1973: 19; Phillips, 1976: 17).

[254] Letter from Ken Russell to Norman Swallow (22 March 1959), BBC Written Archives Centre (BBC WAC) T32/1033/2.

[255] Russell directed a second short film with John Betjeman for *Monitor*: *Journey into a Lost World* (BBC TV, 28/02/1960) about historical amusements parks and public exhibitions of London. Arguably, these two films directed by Russell established Betjeman's visual aesthetic seen in television documentaries such as *Metro-Land* (BBC2, 26/02/1973), *A Passion for Churches* (BBC2, 07/12/1974) and *Summoned by the Bells* (BBC1, 29/08/1976).

[256] Memo from Nancy Thomas (3 March 1959), BBC Written Archives Centre (BBC WAC) T32/948/1.

[257] Kay Dickinson, '"The Very New Can Only Come from the Very Old": Ken Russell, National Culture and the Possibility of Experimental Television at the BBC in the 1960s', in *Experimental British Television* (Mulvey and Sexton, ed.) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 75-76.

Boshier, Pauling Boty and Peter Phillips; who themselves blurred the boundaries between cultural and artistic forms. Dickinson further identifies a central tension in Russell's approach to pushing cultural boundaries because he retained the previous generations value-systems through both his allegiance toward and reverence for classical music.[258]

Additionally, this period of medium expansion and legitimisation was underlined by the development of television criticism. Here, serious critics from quality newspapers aimed to legitimise television as a medium, through elevating its cultural status to art. This was to counter the mediums ephemeral nature, reliance on popular genres and its association with the working-class.[259] Serious television critics adapted their critical practice from impressionistic literary criticism and the shared middle-class cultural values, such as the individual text and author.[260] Rosalind Coward argued that as television had developed from radio broadcasting, it adopted the tradition of placing significance on the individual author, predominantly the writer, and used its literary and romantic associations to elevate the cultural value of television as a medium above its industrial and collective means of its production to that of art.[261] Furthermore, serious television critics aimed to elevate their own critical practice and guide the mediums artistic development by placing value on serious genres such as drama and documentary, formal innovation, and public service ethics.[262]

## 2.3. *Elgar: Portrait of a Composer* (BBC Television, 11 November 1962): the development and distinction of dramatised documentary on television

Between 1955 and 1970, increasing liberalism and experimentation at the BBC is represented by the development of dramatised documentary. For reference, John Corner defines dramatised documentary as a "documentary base or core [that] uses dramatisation to overcome certain

[258] Dickinson, '"The Very New Can Only Come from the Very Old", 80'.
[259] Paul Rixon, *TV Critics and Popular Culture: A History of British Television Criticism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 77-78.
[260] Serious television critics tended to share a university-educated background, middle-class cultural values, and literary perspective. Furthermore, serious television criticism developed their practice from theatre and film reviewing. Significant serious television criticism included: Peter Black for the *Daily Mail*, Mary Crozier for *The Guardian*, Sean Day-Lewis for *The Daily Telegraph*, T.C. Worsley for the *Financial Times*, Philip Purser for the *Sunday Telegraph*, and Maurice Wiggin for the *Sunday Times*.
[261] Rosalind Coward, 'Dennis Potter and the Question of the Television Author', *Critical Quarterly* (29:4) (1987), 81-82.
[262] Rixon, *TV Critics and Popular Culture*, 87.

limitations and achieve a more broadly popular and imaginatively powerful effect."[263] In Britain, the dramatised documentary developed from: the pre-war radio and the journalistic practice of mediating factual material through drama; and the wartime British Documentary Film Movement's 'story documentary', where a documentary theme was shaped around character and the modes of fictional narrative cinema.[264] Television initially adopted dramatic reconstruction to overcome the technical limitations of live broadcasting and move toward, what the producer Caryl Doncaster titled, 'dramatised story documentary' in representing contemporary social issues.[265] Derek Paget argued the documentary claim was further interrogated through technical innovation and formal experimentation throughout the 1960s which resulted in the development of the docudrama and the distinction between the "documentary drama", or the dramatised documentary, and the "drama documentary",[266] a form of drama that is documentary in character; either in referentiality to real events or in the manner of depiction.[267]

Ken Russell pushed cultural distinctions, and thus institutional boundaries at the BBC, through blurring documentary and drama through the dramatised documentary. Throughout the decade, Russell moved from incorporating dramatic reconstruction in documentary profiles to feature-length television biography. John Hill identified the experimentalism of Russell's work as residing "in its challenge to the conventional distinctions between 'drama' and 'documentary' employed by the BBC at this time and its engagement in the creation of new hybridised forms that drew on the conventions of both."[268] Furthermore, Russell pushed institutional boundaries and conventions concerning documentary and historical representation at the BBC. Primarily, Russell succeeded in incrementally winning concessions at *Monitor* in line with the increasing critical attention that his work attracted during that particular period.

The imperative toward drama is situated in the fantastic mode of Ken Russell's amateur films. Russell first attempted to incorporate dramatic impersonation in *A Poet in London* but was

[263] John Corner, *The Art of the Record: A Critical Introduction to Documentary* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 35.
[264] Corner, *The Art of the Record*, 36-37.
[265] Corner.
[266] Derek Paget, *No Other Way to Tell It: Docudrama on Film and Television* (Second ed.) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 206.
[267] Corner, *The Art of the Record*, 35.
[268] John Hill, 'Blurring the Lines Between Fact and Fiction: Ken Russell, the BBC and Television Biography', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* (12:4) (2015), 456.

denied using a costumed child to impersonate a young John Betjeman.[269] As editor of *Monitor*, Wheldon was suspicious of dramatic reconstruction in documentary because it could be considered to be deceptive as it gave false authority to artifice.[270] Feeling constrained by the BBC Talks Department, Russell was commissioned by Norman Swallow to write several treatments for the BBC Film Department. These treatments include: an adaptation of H.G. Well's *Wheel of Chance*, a biography of Sir Edward Elgar which Head of Film Lionel Slater concluded "it is impossible to impersonate the composers and their families by actors", and a semi-autobiographical film about a boarding house that became Russell first film outside of *Monitor* as a producer: *A House in Bayswater* (BBC Television, 26 August 1960).[271]

Regarding the construction of Ken Russell's artistic reputation, an established narrative is the incremental incorporation of dramatic reconstruction in his documentary profiles which led to the full dramatisation of documentary through television biographies. In 1961, Russell's first concession regarding dramatic reconstruction was in *Prokofie*v*: Portrait of a Soviet Composer* (BBC Television, 18 June 1961): an impressionistic documentary profile of the composer Sergei Prokofiev. Here, Russell was permitted to impersonate Prokofiev's hands in close-up playing the piano.[272] In 1962, Russell pushed the dramatic imperative further with *The Lonely Shore* (BBC Television, 14 January 1962): an imaginative short film written by Jacquetta Hawkes about a future archaeologist discovering the remanent material culture of the twentieth century.[273] And then the '*Monitor* Special', *Pop Goes the Easel:* that dramatised the aforementioned Pop Artist's dreams.[274] Moreover, Russell developed the approach of *Prokofiev* and further incorporated dramatic reconstruction and impersonation in *Elgar*: a dramatised documentary of the composer Sir Edward Elgar. Here, Russell was permitted,

[269] John Baxter, *An Appalling Talent: Ken Russell* (Michael Joseph, 1973), 17.
[270] Baxter, *An Appalling Talent*, 123.
[271] Letter from Donald Wilson to Ken Russell (8 May 1960), BBC WAC T48/508/1; Memo from Lionel Slater to A. H. Films, (2 June 1959), BBC WAC T32/1033/2.
[272] *Prokofiev* was repeated on the BBC throughout the 1960s (BBC TV, 18/06/1961; BBC TV, 06/08/1962) including '*Omnibus* presenting The Ken Russell Festival' (BBC1, 25/06/1968).
[273] *The Lonely Shore* featured De Chirico-like visuals but received a negative reception. Peter Black (*The Daily Mail*, 1962) considered the film compelling made but nihilistic and Arthur Calder-Marshall (*The Listener*) felt it failed because Jacquetta Hawkins script felt like a "a blue-stockingette lecture" (Calder-Marshal: 1962, 144).
[274] *Pop Goes the Easel* has been repeated on the BBC several times over the decades: BBC TV, 29/07/1963; 'Festival 77': BBC2, 11/08/1977; 'The Pop Show', BBC2, 14/09/1991; BBC4, 28/09/2008.

though without dialogue and only in long-shot, to use costumed actors to play Elgar (Peter Brett) and his contemporaries.[275]

In this established narrative, *Elgar* is regarded to be Ken Russell's first television biography and to have brought him public attention. *Elgar* was conceived as a prestige production to mark the 100th episode of *Monitor*. *Prokofiev* was critically praised for its romantic narrative of a critically maligned artist overcoming failure and its technique of biographical documentary; which combined pre-existing visual material with specially filmed dramatic sequences.[276] *Prokofiev* provided a template for Huw Wheldon who wished to make a film that would "command important critical attention."[277]

The BBC described *Elgar* as "a film biography of the composer Sir Edward Elgar, comprising reconstructed events in his life."[278] Despite its reputation rising throughout the decade, *Elgar* was divisive on its initial transmission. In *The Daily Mail*, television critic Peter Black felt that *Elgar* fell short of the impressionistic biographical technique established in *Prokofiev* and would have preferred an "austerity of treatment".[279] Moreover, Black argued that *Elgar*'s central problem was the "judgement of balance" in regard to acted reconstruction and that Russell: "seemed to me to contribute to many of his of his own overloadings."[280] Additionally, *Elgar* also received a negative reception from the conservative publication: *Time and Tide* (1920-1986). Here, an editorial criticised the representation of Elgar as a pacifist and argued that the dramatised documentary profile undermined patriotism.[281] However, this contrasted with the popular response indicated in the BBC Audience Research Report. *Elgar* resonated with audiences who found the "impersonal" style of filming appropriate for documentary and felt the "whole alliance of music and photography with mute actors and narration proved a sympathetic and altogether delightful means of looking at the story of Elgar and his works".[282] Internally, *Elgar* was considered a success by the BBC. The Programme Planning Committee

[275] Costumed actors as historical persons filmed as a contemporary television report had spoken dialogue previously on the imported North American series, *You Are There* (CBS, 1953-1957). This was broadcast on BBC Television between 1954 and 1958.
[276] Peter Black, 'Peter Black's Teleview: *Monitor*: *Prokofiev'*, *Daily Mail* (19 June 1961), BFI press clippings.
[277] Memo from Assistant Head of Talks to H.T.C.A.Tel. (14 August 1962), BBC WAC T32/1033/2.
[278] '*Elgar*: Programme as Broadcast', BBC WAC T32/1033/1.
[279] Peter Black, 'Last Night ... Television: *Monitor*: *Elgar'*, *Daily Mail* (12 November 1962).
[280] Black, 'Last Night ... Television: *Monitor*: *Elgar'*.
[281] Anon., 'Who Decides the Strange Policy of the BBC? The Reith Lectures… And The Great Elgar', *Time & Tide* (15 November 1962), BBC WAC T32/1033/2.
[282] BBC Audience Research Department, 'Audience Research Report: *Elgar*' (3 December 1962), BBC WAC T32/1033/2.

praised "the excellence of the film contribution to the Last Sunday's *Elgar* edition of *Monitor*" and alongside Russell, they highlighted the work of the cameraman Ken Higgins and editor Allan Tyrer "who both played a memorable part in a memorable programme."[283]

As stated, *Elgar*'s critical status rose throughout the decade and became the television biography Ken Russell was most associated with. Furthermore, *Elgar* was awarded the 'Best Documentary Television Script' at the Television and Screenwriters Guild of 1962 and repeatedly transmitted throughout the decade.[284] On its repeat transmission in 1966, *Elgar* is marketed in the *Radio Times* as "the famous award-winning film biography of England's greatest composer."[285] And in *The Guardian*, television critic Mary Crozier acknowledged that *Elgar's* status had risen to "now become a classic of TV […] nothing that surpasses the wonderful matching of mood and music."[286] Regarding *Elgar*'s popular status, Electric and Musical Industries (EMI) credited *Elgar* for an increase in the sales of Elgar's recorded music and impacted on Elgar's rehabilitation.[287] Furthermore, EMI used a still image from *Elgar*, that of the boy riding a pony on the Malvern Hills, as an album cover for *The Miniature Elgar* release and acknowledge that it was "inspired by the BBC-TV Monitor film".[288] Moreover, the romanticism of *Elgar* became a model and comparison point, establishing critical and popular expectations, for Russell's subsequent television biographies. Furthermore, *Elgar*'s reputation enabled Russell's first attempt at crossing-over into commercial cinema with the Kenneth Harper produced comedy: *French Dressing* (Ken Russell, 1964).[289]

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[283] Memo from S.J. de Lotbiniere to H.F.Tel. (14 November 1962), BBC WAC T32/1033/2.

[284] Following its initial transmission *Elgar* (BBC TV, 11/11/1962) was repeated throughout the 1960s (BBC TV, 16/05/1963; 'Sunday Night', BBC1, 26/06/1966; '*Omnibus* presenting The Ken Russell Festival': BBC1, 16/07/1968). *Elgar* was further repeated on television ('Festival 40': BBC2, 19/08/1976; '*Arena,* Ken Russell's': BBC2, 27/03/1984; BBC4, 02/07/2007). In the United Kingdom, *Elgar* has been commercially released by the BFI: with separate VHS (2001) and DVD (2003) releases and as part of *The Ken Russell Collection: The Great Composers* dual-formant DVD and Blu-ray boxset (2016).

[285] Memo from Enid Harvard to Mrs Cox (10th June 1966), BBC WAC T32/1033/2.

[286] Mary Crozier, 'Television: *Elgar*, repeat transmission', *The Guardian* (27/061966), BFI press clippings.

[287] Letter from JKR Whittle to Ken Russell (9 September 1964), BBC WAC T32/1033/2

[288] Letter from Anne James to N. Boyle (23 May 1963), BBC WAC T32/1033/2; Letter from Nicolas Boyle to Anne James (29 May 1963), BBC WAC T32/1033/2.

[289] *French Dressing* is comedy that blurs the continental humour of René Claire and Jacques Tati with end-of-pier sensibilities. The critical reception of *French Dressing* foregrounded Russell's reputation as a talent but the film was considered to have a failed as comedy because of Russell's inexperience with actors and the self-conscious admixture of styles. Despite the negative critical reception, the promise of Russell's talent was considered enough for film critics in the quality press to anticipate his next feature film.

## 2.4. *The Debussy Film: Impressions of the French Composer* (BBC One, 18 May 1965) and *Isadora, the Biggest Dancer in the World* (BBC One, 22 September 1966): the distinction of authored documentary on television

The dramatisation of *Elgar* enabled Ken Russell to transition into the commercial cinema but the critical and commercial failure of *French Dressing* compelled him to return to BBC Television.[290] Russell's return to *Monitor* coincided with the increasing liberalism on television and the expansion of arts programming. This expansion was represented with the launch of BBC Two on the 20th April 1964. Additionally, authorship increasingly became a means of institutional and critical distinction to elevate television to the status of a medium suitable for artistic self-expression. Returning to the BBC, this was a significant moment for Russell's institutional status and critical reputation. John Hill identified this as Russell increasingly being deemed a 'special talent' at the BBC and his films being produced as "prestige projects that merited longer running times and larger budgets than other contributions to [*Monitor*]" and that television critics increasingly considered him to possess an "authorial signature of a filmmaker who might legitimately lay claim to be an 'artist' in his own right."[291]

On return to the BBC, Ken Russell corresponded with Hugh Carleton Greene's liberal version of public service broadcasting and increasingly experimented with dramatisation. This was seen in *Béla Bartók* (BBC One, 24 May 1964): a dramatised documentary about the Hungarian composer Béla Bartók (Boris Ranevsky) that combined biographical documentary reconstruction with Pop Art interpretations of his music. More significantly, Russell collaborated with writer-producer John McGrath on the experimental series: *Six* (BBC Two, 1964-165).[292] Co-written with McGrath, Russell adapted George and Weedon Grossmith's satirical novel, *Diary of a Nobody: The Domestic Jottings of a City Clerk* (BBC Two, 12 December 1964), in the style of a silent comedy. As an adaptation, *Diary of a Nobody* received

[290] *French Dressing* premiered as part of 'British Film Season' on BBC2 (02/11/1971) and has been repeated several times thereafter: BBC2, 11/09/1973; Channel 4, 03/03/1999.
[291] Hill, 'Blurring the Lines between Fact and Fiction', 464.
[292] John McGrath: political and experimental. Created *Z Cars* (1962-1978) with Troy Kennedy (i.e., drama-documentary) and *Diary of a Young Man* directed by Ken Loach. Introduced greater realism but moved away from naturalism. *Seven Lean Years* (1964) for Ken Russell. *Six*, co-written *Diary of a Nobody* (1964). *Billion Dollar Brain* declined *The Devils* and relationship ended over an unrealised adaptation of Patrick White's novel, *Voss*.

a negative critical reception with Maurice Ricardson of *The Observer* criticising the film being a "too self-conscious exercise rather than a genuine re-creation."[293]

Alongside Russell, Peter Watkins also pushed institutional boundaries through dramatised documentary with *Culloden* (BBC One, 1964): a political re-examination of the Jacobite rising of 1745, where costumed actors impersonated historical figures. This experimentation was institutionally endorsed and is seen in the changing attitude of Huw Wheldon, editor of *Monitor*, toward dramatised documentary. On promotion to Controller of BBC Television, Wheldon modified his resistance to dramatic reconstruction and artistic interpretation in documentary. Previously, Wheldon had been resistant because dramatic reconstruction threatened balance and impartiality. In *The Observer*, Wheldon stated "with […] director Ken Russell and others, I am actively exploring a new hinterland that lies between factual documentary on the one hand and fictional drama on the other. It is essentially a world of poetic imagination."[294]

Alongside experimentation at the BBC, the BBC increasingly privileged authored documentaries to elevate their television arts programming. Carried over from BBC Radio and into television, cultural value and prestige were placed on the literary author and the playwright, which transferred to the author of single television drama.[295] In *Factual Television*, Norman Swallow challenged this and proposed the concept of the "personal documentary" which was comparable to "serious" television drama as: "the individual work of its producer and/or director and which, through its imaginative handling of reality, expresses his own attitude [of] the whole of the world in which he lives".[296] Arguing that the "genuine maker of the personal documentary is an artist."[297] Russell is one of the individuals singled out in this regard.[298] Furthermore, Swallow argued that the television biography was a legitimate form of factual television. Swallow defined the television biography as: "with the use of authentic locations and personal objects, together with some discrete impersonation", "attempts to

[293] Maurice Richardson, 'Television: Pootering on the Box: *Dairy of a Nobody*', *The Observer* (13 December 1964), BFI Press Clippings.
[294] Anon., 'Briefing: Driven by the Furies', *The Observer* (24 January 1965), 23.
[295] Rosalind Coward, 'Dennis Potter and the Question of the Television Author', *Critical Quarterly* (29: 4) (1987), 79–87.
[296] Norman Swallow, *Factual Television* (London: Focal Press, 1966), 176.
[297] Swallow, *Factual Television*.
[298] Alongside Russell, Swallow lists: Dennis Mitchell, John Schlesinger, Phillip Donnellan, Don Haworth, John Ormond, Richard Marquand, Peter Morley, John Boorman and Peter Watkins as directors of personal documentarians (Swallow: 1966; 176).

suggest the essence of a particular writer or poet or artist".[299] Furthermore, Swallow privileged television biographies that balanced the artistic with a human approach. For example, *Elgar* which he described as: "much more than a biography of the English composer: it is a study both of the creative process, and of the essence of religious faith."[300]

On return to the BBC, *The Debussy Film: Impressions of the French Composer* (BBC One, 18 May 1965) represents Ken Russell's transition from dramatic reconstruction in documentary, or the dramatised documentary, to feature-length television biography.[301] Co-written with Melvyn Bragg, *The Debussy Film* was considered Russell's most personal film made for *Monitor* to that date and was conceived as a prestige film to be scheduled outside the Sunday late-night slot traditionally reserved for arts programming.[302] A meta-documentary about the French composer Claude Debussy (Oliver Reed), *The Debussy Film* adopted the self-reflexive device of a film-within-a-film where the lives of the actors increasingly blurred with the historical figures they were portraying. Moreover, this device permitted Russell to incorporate documentary voiceover into the diegesis as character dialogue; the fictional Director (Vladek Sheybal) replaced the authoritative narration of Huw Wheldon. The BBC clearly prepared audiences that *The Debussy* was dramatised and, in doing so, foregrounded Russell's authorship. In the *Radio Times*, Russell was given space to clarify the concept behind the film:

> we hit upon the framework of a film about a film on [Claude] Debussy with the director and his actors recreating fragments on the composer's life, searching for answers, and gradually taking on the personality and relationships of the characters they play, until the edges blur and the present merges into the past."[303]

Furthermore, this prepared viewers for what Hill identified as the move away in Russell's dramatised documentaries from broader socio-historical forces on the individual artist toward sexual themes and imagery.[304]

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[299] Swallow, *Factual Television*, 158.
[300] Swallow, *Factual Television*, 177.
[301] *The Debussy Film* was written for the producer of David Deutsch but was deemed unviable for the commercial film industry (Baxter, 1972: 19).
[302] Memo from Huw Wheldon to Editor of *Monitor* (2 September 1964), BBC WAC T32/1095/3; Memo from Humphrey Burton to Art Editor, *Radio Times* (31 March 1965), BBC WAC T32/1095/3; Letter from Monitor Programme to Mrs E. Crowder (8 July 1965), BBC WAC T32/1095/1.
[303] Ken Russell, 'Why a Film on a French Composer was shot at Eastbourne?', *Radio Times* BBC WAC T32/1095/1.
[304] Hill, 'Blurring the Lines Between Fact and Fiction', 466.

The critical reception of *The Debussy Film* is significant because it represents Russell's growing reputation as a television director. Despite divisiveness, critical evaluations of *The Debussy Film* in the quality press centred on: the appropriateness of generic and formal experimentation through dramatisation in documentary, and the appropriateness of foregrounding authorial style in relation to the interpretation of biographical subjects. A central criticism of *The Debussy Film* was that its approach and style was derivative of the French New Wave and too self-conscious to sufficiently illuminate its subject. [305] For example, John Holmstrom of the *New Statesman* criticised the film as: "the most blatant and boring exercise in directorial show-off, using its composer-subject as the merest peg in which to hang a whole panoply of threadbare Pirandellisms and old-hat nouvelle-vagaries."[306] Similarly, Margaret Laing of *The Sunday Times* found this style to be "highly-wrought" but concluded: "the final blend of these elements, with the odd exception […], achieved an independence and originality of their own."[307] And in the *Financial Times*, T. C. Worsley praised Russell's departure from conventional documentary style, arguing he had "started a new dimension in documentaries", but had reservations regarding biography because he had "produced in the end a remarkable portrait of a period even if it missed the man."[308] However, this somewhat contrasted with the critical reception of *The Debussy Film* in the popular press which generally welcomed the generic and formal experimentation because of the irreverent approach to high culture.

Evidenced in the cohesive statements made in the critical reception of *The Debussy Film*, is the establishment of critical expectations in relation to Ken Russell. Particularly, in regard to the television biography as genre and the identification of a recognisable authorial style as a television director. Primarily, the appropriateness of Russell's authorial style and tone for serious subject-matter and theme, and the coherence between authorial style and subject-matter appropriate for biographical subjects, such as artists and composers. Significantly, television critics note Russell's tendency to foreground his direction through an authorial style that has a

[305] Similarly, *Don't Shoot the Composer* was a self-reflexive profile of the French film composer Georges Delerue in the style of the French New Wave; Russell appeared in the film as himself. Delerue subsequently composed the scores for *French Dressing* and *Women in Love* (Ken Russell, 1969).
[306] John Holmstrom, 'Television: Tourists: *Monitor, The Debussy Film* (BBC1)', *New Statesman* (Friday 4 June 1965), BFI press clippings.
[307] Margaret Laing, 'Television: Bewildering – but they found the man: *Monitor, The Debussy Film* (BBC1)'', *The Sunday Times* (23 May 1965), BBC WAC T32/1095/1.
[308] T. C. Worsley, 'Television: *Monitor*, *The Debussy Film* (BBC1)*'*, *Financial Times* (Wednesday 26 May 1965), BFI Press Clippings.

tendency toward – although, euphemisms such as 'over-wrought' are used at this point – excess.

Following *The Debussy Film*, the critical discourse around Ken Russell foregrounded authorial talent and style in relation to medium innovation, and discussed the appropriateness of authorial interpretation, seriousness of tone and excess. The critical reception of *Isadora, the Biggest Dancer in the World* (BBC One, 22 September 1966), a biography of the American dancer Isadora Duncan (Vivian Pickles),[309] is significant because cohesive critical statements are repeated about Russell's authorial style which structure later evaluations of his television biographies and contribute to his reputation as a television director.[310] For example, Peter Black of the *Daily Mail* identified: "Ken Russell style is to tell his biographies in the style of the subject's life and work".[311]

Evaluating the artistic merits of a personal authorial style becomes a concern for serious critics in the quality press. In *The Daily Telegraph*, Sean Day-Lewis assesses Ken Russell's biographical approach as: "to stylise according to his subject to the point where his very willingness to be led by the subject becomes a personal style."[312] And for Day-Lewis, a consequence of this was that Isadora Duncan was portrayed "overwhelming as an eccentric whose notions […] are not to be taken too seriously."[313] As this style is also associated with excess, there is a concern for its appropriateness for historical and biographical subjects. For example, Maurice Richardson of the *Observer* assessed that Russell's "film-style may be a trifle over-baroque at times, but here it seemed to me to suit its subject admirably."[314] Regarding *Isadora*, Ruth Hall of *The Sunday Times* acknowledges its appropriateness for Isadora Duncan and praises Russell for finding "a subject as larger-than-life as his own style" and that "all the laboured visual effects […] appeared perfectly valid when applied to one whose whole life was a grand pretension."[315] Furthermore, Philip Purser of the *Sunday Telegraph* praised the excesses stating: "that the marvellous things about *Isadora* were the

[309] Following 'The Ken Russell Festival' (BC1, 26/03/1967), *Isadora* was repeated a single time (BBC1, 19/03/1969).
[310] *Isadora* (Karel Reisz, 1969), written by Melvyn Bragg and starring Vanessa Redgrave, was in production at the same time.
[311] Peter Black, 'Television: Peter Black: *The Debussy Film* (BBC1)', *Daily Mail* (Friday 23 September 1966), BFI press clippings.
[312] Sean Day-Lewis, 'Television: Film's Confusion on *Isadora Duncan* (BBC.1)', *Daily Telegraph* (Friday 23 September 1966), BFI press clippings.
[313] Day-Lewis, '*Isadora Duncan*', *The Daily Telegraph*, BFI Press Clippings.
[314] Maurice Richardson, 'Television: Panache in the maelstrom: *Isadora Duncan* (BBC-1)', *Observer* (Sunday 25 September 1966), BFI press clippings.
[315] Ruth Hall, '*Isadora Duncan* (BBC1)', *The Sunday Times* (Sunday 29 September 1966), BFI press clippings.

things which would be the first to be eliminated by those grim Anglo-Saxon guardians, Good Taste and Moderation."[316]

The critical reception of *Isadora* went further in constructing Ken Russell's artistic reputation than *The Debussy Film* – specifically, in assigning Russell with the status of an artist. In *The Guardian*, Mary Crozier argued that despite an increasing taste for the grotesque: "the total impression, as with all of Ken Russell's films, was one of extremely vivid closely integrated music, movement, and speech: a work of art in itself."[317] Similarly in *The Daily Mail*, Peter Black argued that while "farce constantly and savagely intruded […] the last sequence achieved a marriage of arts for which superb is an understatement."[318]

Central to elevating Ken Russell to the status of artist is the criticism of Nancy Banks-Smith of *The Sun* and later *The Guardian.* In his study of television criticism, Rixon identified Banks-Smith was an early adopter of neo-criticism which developed as television became the dominant medium. A softer form of criticism, neo-critics shared the same middle-class cultural values as serious critics but approached television as a form of popular culture and foregrounded both their experience as viewers and their personality through humour.[319] Regarding *Isadora*, Banks-Smith argued that excess was appropriate if it was artistic and concluded that: "as I'm concerned a taste for cannibalism can grow on him, provided he turns it into this kind of art. He is the only poet working in television."[320]

In the popular press, the dramatisation of documentary was more critically divisive. Particularly, one main concern was that foregrounding authorial style overwhelmed the biographical subject and led to historical and biographical misrepresentation, which undermined documentary impartiality. This concern increased throughout the decade as Ken Russell's institutional status permitted him to represent the contradictions of the romantic artist by means of a less reverent tone. Adopting himself, a contradictory biographical approach that combined literary and cinematic traditions. Specifically, the literary approach and tone of Lytton Strachey, H. S. Ede and A. J. A. Symons combined with the cinematic approach and

[316] Philip Purser, 'Television: A Time Danced By: *Isadora Duncan - The Biggest Dancer in the World* (B.B.C 1)', *Sunday Telegraph* (25 September 1966), BFI Press Clippings.
[317] Mary Crozier, '*Isadora* on BBC-1', *The Guardian* (23 September 1966), BFI Press Clippings.
[318] Peter Black, '*Isadora Duncan*', *Daily Mail*, 23 September 1966, BFI Press Clippings.
[319] Rixon, *TV Critics and Popular Culture*, 101-130.
[320] Nancy Banks-Smith, 'Television: *Isadora Duncan* (BBC-1)', *The Sun* (23 September 1966), BFI Press Clippings.

structure of *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941) and the focus on the personal lives of historical figures seen in the Alexander Korda produced 'Private Lives' series of biopics of the 1930s.[321]

Following *Isadora*, Ken Russell directed *Dante's Inferno* (BBC One, 22 December 1967) about the Pre-Raphaelite poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti (Oliver Reed). In her review of *Dante's Inferno*, Banks-Smith went against the consensus of television critics who were disappointed in their consideration of Russell's artistic reputation and the biography seeming to be undisciplined, excessive, and lacking in narrative. Instead, Banks-Smith firmly aligns Russell's reputation with the romanticism of his subjects and proposes that Russell is the "the greatest romantic director in television" and questions "how anything like Russell managed to happen in this prefabricated plastic generation."[322] Alternatively, Russell's irreverent tone is reflected in descriptions of himself. In Philip Purser's review of *Dante's Inferno* for *The Sunday Telegraph*, 'Brother Ken Strikes Again', a reference to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Russell is described in an unflattering manner:

> shaggy, rotund, unpredictable, drugged with celluloid, hooked on extravagance Ken Russell and into a then orderly world of respectful documentaries about the arts he lurched like a mad, red nose-nosed genius on a circus bike. […] decorum went out of the window.[323]

In describing Ken Russell as a "red nose-nosed genius on a circus bike", Purser refers to an emerging contradiction between Russell's artistic and popular reputation; that is, the seriousness of his public persona.[324] Following *Dante's Inferno*, divisiveness notably becomes a critical expectation in itself.

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[321] At the BBC, Russell attempted to adapt Michael Holroyd's *Lytton Strachey: A Critical Biography* (1967-68) and A. J. Symons *The Quest for Corvo* (1934) as television biographies (BBC WAC and BFI Press Clippings). Russell adapted H. S. Ede's *Savage Messiah: Biography of the Sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska* (1934) as *Savage Messiah* (Ken Russell, 1972).

[322] Nancy Banks-Smith, 'Television: A tiny tiara for this cameraman: *Omnibus*, *Dante's Inferno* (BBC-1)', *The Sun*, 22 December 1967, BFI Press Clippings.

[323] Philip Purser, 'Television: Brother Ken strikes again: *Omnibus, Dante's Inferno* (B.B.C. 1)', *The Sunday Telegrap*h (Sunday 24 December 1967), BFI Press Clippings.

[324] Purser, 'Brother Ken strikes again', BFI press clippings. .

## 2.5. The development of Ken Russell's popular reputation and public persona as 'The Wild Man of the BBC'

During the 1960s, Ken Russell developed a popular reputation as 'The Wild Man of the BBC' alongside his artistic reputation as the 'television-director-as-artist'. Initially employed in the popular press, Russell's popular reputation was constructed around his television biographies being considered increasingly critically divisive because of their association with cultural permissiveness. In response to the development of this popular reputation and a perception of increasing authorial self-indulgence, critics began to consider Russell to be a wayward talent. Reinforcing this popular reputation, Russell also cultivated a public persona to distinguish himself from other television directors crossing-over into the film industry.

In contrast to the institutional-critical construction of Ken Russell's artistic reputation was the development of a popular reputation. Russell's popular reputation was constructed around the representation of his television biographies becoming increasingly associated with permissiveness on television following *The Debussy Film*. Consequently, Russell was predominantly written about in the popular press in sensationalist terms. Primarily, as 'The Wild Man of the BBC'. Russell's popular reputation was also constructed in correspondence with the moral opposition to the liberal conception of public service broadcasting during the 1960s. Representative of this opposition was Mary Whitehouse's 'Clean-Up TV' campaign which charged the BBC, and Hugh Carleton Greene as Director-General, of not upholding good taste and decency; particularly, in regard to the presentation of sex and violence on television.

During this period, Ken Russell's popular reputation was largely constructed in the popular press. A significant press article that contributed to the construction of Russell's popular reputation was Julian Holland's article for *The Daily Mail*: 'Striking again tonight… The Wild Man of the BBC'.[325] Written to coincide with the transmission of *Always on Sunday* (BBC One, 29 June 1965), a biography of the French post-impressionist artist Henri Rousseau (James Llyod), Holland's article disseminates the narrative around Russell's contribution to the dramatisation of documentary on television in a more populist form:

[325] Julian Holland, 'Striking again tonight… The Wild Man of The BBC'', *Daily Mail* (29 June 1965), BFI press clippings.

> Late one evening just six weeks ago, people watching television sat up and started to take more notice than is usual around that hour. The B.B.C. were showing a film about a musician, *The Debussy Film*. But it wasn't the usual agglomeration of library stills, stiff narration and dusty facts. It was fun. And that alone was a revolution.[326]

Here, Holland centres Ken Russell in the development of the dramatised documentary: "The man who made it was Ken Russell, and tonight he carries his revolution a step further with a 'wild' biography of the painter [Henri] Rousseau."[327] Furthermore, Holland recounts the narrative around the incremental incorporation of dramatic reconstruction:

> [Ken] Russell started his revolution on a small scale. He made a film about Prokofiev and showed the "composer's" hands playing the piano. Then he made a film about Elgar and included a full-length figure "of the composer". It was in the distance but people those *tck-ing* noises and shook their heads and wondered if it was quite proper. Then in *The Debussy Film* he had an actor impersonate [Claude] Debussy. Even in close-up. "We went the whole hog that time," [Russell] grins in reminiscence. "But it finally cleared the air of that word 'documentary' and all that it entails."[328]

Moreover, Holland includes an interview quote from Russell in which indicates the relative creative freedom his status at the BBC afforded him and, consequently, allowed him to assert television as a medium suitable for artistic self-expression. Here, Russell is quoted: "One of the good things about the BBC set-up […] is that it allows you to do things you like doing.[329]

In subsequent articles, Ken Russell becomes increasingly associated with cultural permissiveness. In *The Evening Standard* article 'Mr Russell Dreams up an Orgy', Sydney Edwards detailed the production of *Isadora* and described it as "another arty orgy is on the way" but stressed in the subtitle and the text that it would "be in the best taste".[330] The word "orgy" is itself taken from a quote Russell provided about representing Isadora Duncan's

[326] Holland, 'Striking again tonight', BFI press clippings.
[327] Holland, 'Striking Again Tonight...'
[328] Holland.
[329] Holland.
[330] Sydney Edwards, 'Mr Russell Dreams up an Orgy: in the best taste of course', *The Evening Standard* (10 October 1965), BFI Press Clippings.

private life: "there were many love affairs […], the orgies some which we'll show, were never set-up as such. They just happened."[331] In a later article for *The Guardian*, written to coincide with the transmission of *Dante's Inferno*, David Bruxner included an interview quote from Russell in regard to representing the private life of Dante Gabriel Rossetti.[332] Here, Russell is characteristically blunt: "The film should deal no less truthfully with Rossetti's love affairs and more casual encounters. There will be a scene showing Rossetti in bed with Janey Morris, which will be more tender and passionate. Another scene will show Rossetti leading Annie Miller into some Bracken in Epping Forest, but the rest will be left to the viewer's imagination."[333]

In a later article for *The Evening Standard*, Edwards also described Ken Russell's contribution to the dramatisation of documentary as a revolution. Here, proposing that Russell had: "revolutionised the once-stereotyped art of making biographical documentaries."[334] And again, Russell himself foregrounds television as a medium suitable for artistic self-expression: "I've always wanted to make films and the only place you can make the sort of documentary biographies I like doing is in TV. […] It is almost impossible to get the backing to make a commercial film of that kind."[335] Furthermore, Russell also indicates that he is moving away from an uncritical romantic approach to historical and biographical subject-matter: "I am interested in failure or people who have tremendous struggle all their lives. I am also attracted to the ambiguous people whose characters and actions can be taken one way or the other."[336] As the decade progressed, the critical reception of Russell in the quality press recognised this popular reputation and increasingly labelled Russell as 'wayward'. Though, the representation of biographical subjects personal lives were considered within the boundaries of taste during this period.

A central aspect of Ken Russell's public persona that is established during this period is his antagonism toward critics and criticism. This antagonism was first expressed privately and indicated in Russell's letter to Michael Balcon where he described himself as a "despised

[331] Edwards, 'Mr Russell Dreams up an Orgy', BFI press clippings.
[332] David Bruxner, 'Russell's Rossetti', *The Guardian* (26 November 1966), BFI press clippings.
[333] Bruxner, 'Russell's Rossetti', BFI press clippings.
[334] Sydney Edwards, 'TV's Young Lions – 2', *The Evening Standard* (30 December 1966), BFI press clippings.
[335] Edwards, 'TV's Young Lions', BFI press clippings.
[336] Edwards.

amateur" despite the critical praise of *Amelia and the Angel*.[337] At the BBC, Russell first expressed antagonism towards critics in a series of correspondences with the documentarist Derrick Knight.[338] Both Knight and Russell shared disappointment in the critical reception of *Elgar*. Here, Russell states that "most of the critics didn't get it at all" but expresses that he felt vindicated that it had been popular with audiences.[339] Following the transmission of *The Debussy Film*, Russell reasoned behind the negative reception of work in a series of correspondences with the television producer Francis Coleman and his wife, the actress Anne Beach.[340] In his response to Beach, Russell posits the reason behind negative critical reception of his work:

> Most English people seem to resent a native making the sort of film I do (good or bad), what's O.K, for a continental film director certainly won't do for an English one and one born and bred in television at that.[341]

Here, Ken Russell is referring to authorial style and excess. At the close of the decade Russell began to express his antagonism towards film critics publicly. The marketing of *Women in Love (*Ken Russell, 1969) acknowledged Russell's popular reputation as the 'Wild Man.'[342] In a feature article to coincide with the release of the film of *Women in Love*, Russell openly states his antagonism toward critics – film critics and their judgement of television in particular: "I hate the critics, most of them. The TV critics were very generous, but after *Billion Dollar Brain* the film critics gave me no credit for having ever done anything else. TV is a dirty word to them."[343]

Additionally, Ken Russell entered British popular culture during this period. As the decade progressed, Russell's biographies and associated 'overwrought' authorial approach and style became recognisable enough to be parodied on television. For example, television critics noted the parodies of Russell in BBC sketch comedies, including: *BBC-3* (BBC One, 1965-1966), *The Benny Hill Show* (BBC Television, 1955-1968) and *Monty Python* (BBC Television, 1969-

[337] Correspondence between Ken Russell to Michael Balcon, 28th August 1958, Michael Balcon Papers in BFI Special Collections (Box N/28).
[338] Letter from Ken Russell to Derrick Knight (10th December 1962), BBC WAC T32/1033/2.
[339] Letter from Russell to Knight, BBC WAC T32/1033/2.
[340] Letter from Ken Russell to Francis Coleman (5th July 1965), BBC WAC T32/1095/1.
[341] Letter from Ken Russell to Ann Beach (28th June 1965), BBC WAC T32/1095/1.
[342] Edna Thomas, 'Ken Russell: Director of *Women in Love*', United Artists, 1969, BFI press clippings.
[343] Peter Lennon, 'Russell's Time', *The Guardian* (1 November 1969), BFI press clippings.

1974).[344] Moreover, Russell's style was parodied in David Turner's three-part adaptation of Stella Gibbon's comic novel: *Cold Comfort Farm* (BBC Two, 1968). Significantly, Russell's style is referenced in relation to Gibbon's parody of D.H. Lawrence's purple prose in *Cold Comfort Farm*. In *The Guardian*, Stanley Reynolds described "the literary parody has been translated into visual terms, becoming parody of such films Ken Russell does for television."[345] Television critics found this parody divisive in itself. For example, Harold Jackson in *The Guardian* argued the "ascent into naked Ken Russell was exactly the touch for the small screen."[346] In contrast, George Melly in *The Observer* criticised the parody as a "bad example of Russelling-up for its own sake."[347]

## 2.6. 'The Ken Russell Festival' (BBC One, 1968): institutional status and prestige through the television retrospective

Following *The Debussy Film*, Ken Russell's artistic reputation and increasing public status enabled him to cross-over again into commercial cinema. As seen with *Elgar* and *French Dressing*, a career in television became an effective route into the cinema for a younger generation of emergent directors during the 1960s.[348] During this period, financial incentives, such as the Eady Levy, and cultural incentives, such as 'Swinging London', attracted American producers. Reporting on this industrial trend, *Variety* noted that Britain permitted a "freedom from filmic convention" and the "license to experiment".[349] Moreover, the producer David Deutsch identified that television was compensating for the shortage of directors who had previously apprenticed on second features: specifically, documentarians who had technical experience of film.[350] In 1966, the most significant career for a television director was *Billion Dollar Brain* (Ken Russell, 1967): the third instalment of the 'Harry Palmer' franchise, based

[344] Anon., 'Looking-in: Rare opportunity missed by B.B.C satirists: *BBC-3* (BBC1)', *The Times* (4 April 1966), 5; Julian Critchley, 'Television: Timely compensation: *The Benny Hill Show* (BBC1)', *The Times* (12 December 1968), 17; Henry Raynor, 'Television: Jokes and people: *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (BBC1)', *The Times* (29 November 1969), 3.
[345] Stanley Reynolds, 'Television: *Cold Comfort Farm* (BBC2)', *The Guardian* (Monday 24 June 1968), 6.
[346] Harold Jackson, 'Television: *Cold Comfort Farm* (BBC2), repeat transmission', *The Guardian* (Saturday 10 January 1970), 6.
[347] George Melly, 'Playing out the old war game: *Omnibus*, *Ken Russell Festival* (BBC-1) and *Cold Comfort Farm* (BBC-2)', *The Observer* (30 June 1968), 26.
[348] BBC documentarians who crossed over into commercial cinema include John Schlesinger, John Boorman, Peter Watkins, and Kevin Billington. Writers associated include John McGrath and Melvyn Bragg.
[349] Robert F. Hawkins, 'Britain's Many Film Charms', *Variety* (3 January 1968), 28.
[350] Robert Ottaway, 'TV's Brain Drain to Films', *Variety* (9 August 1967), 25-26.

on the Len Deighton novels, produced by Harry Saltzman and starring Michael Caine as Harry Palmer.[351]

The rise in Ken Russell's critical reputation and crossing-over into commercial cinema influenced his institutional status as a producer and writer-director at the BBC. During contractual renegotiations at the BBC in 1966, following Russell signing a two-year contract with the film producer Harry Saltzman, Humphrey Burton described Russell as having "become thoroughly professional as a storyteller, and visualiser […] [and] he has probably the greatest reputation of any film director still working in the Corporation."[352] Similarly, Stephen Hearst, Executive Producer of Music & Arts Programmes, described Russell later the same year during the production of *Dante's Inferno* as: "recognised as one of our most outstanding film directors" though, "his budgets impose the greatest strain on our resources."[353]

Regarding Ken Russell's institutional status at the BBC, he repeatedly brought institutional distinction and prestige throughout the decade as he was awarded industry prizes. Following *Elgar*, Russell repeatedly won the Writers Guild of Great Britain award for 'Best Documentary Television Script' from 1966-1968: with Melvyn Bragg for *The Debussy Film*, with Sewell Stokes for *Isadora Duncan*, and with Austin Frazer for *Dante's Inferno*. Consequently, the BBC increasingly adopted Russell's artistic critical reputation and foregrounded Russell as "prize-winning". Here, one can identify a shift in the emphasis from praising Russell as a writer to praising Russell as a director. Russell as a "prize-winning director" was increasingly emphasised in institutional promotion and critical reception following being awarded the Guild of Television Producers and Directors for 'Best Specialised Programme' prize for *Isadora Duncan* and *Don't Shoot the Composer* (BBC One, 29 November 1966).

Furthermore, it was this institutional status that allowed Ken Russell to increasingly experiment with dramatisation and permitted him to overcome institutional controversies such as escalating costs and complaints, typically prompted by statements Russell had made to the

[351] *Billion Dollar Brain* was critical and commercial failure. The critical reception of *Billion Dollar Brain* was considered to not be a serious film in the espionage thriller genre. Primarily, *Billion Dollar Brain* was considered to suffer from directorial imbalance and an incoherent narrative style. Specifically, the film lacked dramatic tension, the humour was mismatched, and the spectacle was in excess. While *French Dressing* could be forgiven because it was Russell's debut film, *Billion Dollar Brain* was a disappointment.

[352] Memo from Humphrey Burton to C, BBC-1, (11th August 1966), BBC WAC T53/99/2.

[353] Memo from Stephen Hearst to C.P.S. Tel (15th September 1966), BBC WAC T53/99/2.

press, from the estates of biographical subjects.[354] For example, Claude Debussy's estate, through his stepdaughter, Madame de Tinan, requested restrictions be placed on *The Debussy Film* because it was felt that Debussy was misrepresented, and audiences would confuse the historical reconstruction of Debussy with the historical figure.[355]

A significant event confirming Ken Russell's institutional status and critical reputation during this period was the four-week *Omnibus* television retrospective: 'The Ken Russell Festival' (BBC One, 25 June–16 July 1968). 'The Ken Russell Festival' included repeats of several of Russell's documentary profiles and television biographies: the first instalment featured *House in Bayswater* and *Prokofiev* (BBC One, 25 June 1968); the second instalment featured *The Dotty World of Lloyd James* and *Always on Sunday* (BBC One, 2 July 1968); the third instalment featured *Béla Bartók* (BBC One, 9 July 1968); and the fourth and final instalment featured *Elgar* (BBC One, 16 July, 1968). Each instalment of 'The Ken Russell Festival' feature a specially filmed introduction presented by Michael Caine; the star of the upcoming release *Billion Dollar Brain*,[356]

Prior to 'The Ken Russell Festival', the BBC positioned Ken Russell in line with his critical reputation. Throughout the decade, the BBC intended to secure Russell's documentary profiles and television biographies for festival entries and to sell to overseas markets. Attaining this international prestige had been prevented due to copyright issues. Here, the practice of using recorded discs for music, restricted to screenings in the United Kingdom.[357] For example, there was a pronounced desire to secure both *Prokofiev* and *The Debussy Film* for the Italia Prize.[358]

[354] Hill, 'Blurring the Lines Between Fact and Fiction'.
[355] The estate would only permit an amended version of *The Debussy Film*, with a new introduction emphasising it was interpretative, being repeated (BBC1, 12/06/1966) with the companion documentary *Boulez on Debussy* (BBC2, 13 June 1966); Memo from Humphrey Burton to C.P.S.Tel., 7th July 1965, BBC WAC T32/1095/2. Similarly, the estate of George and Weedon Grossmith's prevented further repeat transmissions of *Diary of a Nobody* following a single repeat (BBC2, 23/09/1967) and the estate of Frederick Deluis tried to prevent the screening of *Song of Summer* (BBC WAC T53/118/3.)
[356] *Billion Dollar Brain* premiered British terrestrial television on ITV (ITV, 26/11/1972) and has been repeated several times thereafter: 'Sunday Mystery Movie', ITV, 23/07/1974; ITV, 27/03/1977; 'The Sunday Film': BBC1, 27/04/1980; 'Michael Caine in …': BBC2, 30/12/1983; BBC1, 26/07/1986; BBC1, 31/12/1996; 'Citizen Caine': BBC2, 22/12/1999; BBC1, 19/12/2000; BBC1, 04/06/2002; BBC1, 22/10/2003.
[357] Memo from Huw Wheldon to G.M.Tel.R. (5th September 1962), BBC WAC T32/1033/2.
[358] Memo from Kenneth Adam to A.C.C.A.T. Tel (20th June 1961), BBC WAC T32/1001/1; Memo from Humphrey Burton to C.P.Tel. (7th July 1965), BBC WAC T32/1095/2.

As an alternative, Ken Russell's *Monitor* short documentary profiles and features-length biographies became a fixture of the summer repeat season.[359] Furthermore, Russell was profiled on *Late Night Line-Up* (BBC Two, 1964-1972) following the transmission of *Isadora. Russell at Work* (BBC Two, 23 Sep 1966), filmed during the production of *Isadora*, disseminated for a television audience the narrative around Russell's contribution to the dramatisation of documentary and position Russell as an artist in his own right. In *Russell at Work*, Russell is represented in the style of his earlier documentary profiles and the discourses around dramatisation of documentary narrative, directorial practice and authorial intention are foregrounded.

As an institution, the BBC constructed a narrative around Ken Russell as a television author that both confirmed and reinforced his reputation as an artist. The earliest promotional material for the Festival states that "Ken Russell is the BBC's most acclaimed film-maker" and draws upon the prestige he acquired through his award-winning: The Screenwriters' Guild Award, for *Elgar*, *Debussy*, *Isadora Duncan* and *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* and the Guild of Television Producers and Directors Merit Award for *Isadora*.[360] Furthermore, *A House in Bayswater* was stressed for its autobiographical nature[361] and as the "first film Ken Russell wrote, produced and directed for the BBC […] the whole [film] has that bizarre and larger-than-life quality that has become a Russell hallmark."[362] *Prokofiev* was written as pioneering because of its technique of combining material to reconstruct the composer's life[363] was "first of the new-style film biographies which are perhaps Ken Russell's most important contribution to television."[364]

In the *Radio Times*, a short feature about 'The Ken Russell Festival' highlights commonalities between the films that underline authorship in the season, emphasising the "imaginative

[359] *Monitor* shorts that were repeated as part of the summer repeat season include: *From Spain to Streatham: The Guitar Crazy* ('*Monitor* Summer Festival': BBC TV, 24/07/1961), *Variations on a Mechanical Theme* ('*Monitor* Summer Film Season': BBC TV, 23/07/1961), *Scottish Painters* ('*Monitor* Summer Festival': BBC TV, 21/08/1960), *Marie Rambert Remembers* ('*Monitor* Summer Festival': BBC TV, 28/08/1960), *The Miners' Picnic* ('*Monitor* Summer Film Season': BBC TV, 30/07/1961), *Shelagh Delaney's Salford* ('*Monitor Summer Film Season*': BBC TV, 09/07/196), *The Light Fantastic* ('*Monitor* Summer Festival': BBC TV, 06/08/1961), *Lotte Lenya Sings Kurt Weil* ( 'Songs of Pleasure and Protest', BBC TV, 10/09/1962), *Old Battersea House* ('Two Old Ladies', BBC1, 22/07/1964), *Mr Chesher's Traction Engines* ('Eyes of Innocence', BBC1, 12/08/1964) and *Watch the Birdie* ('The City and the Hills', BBC1, 15/07/1964).
[360] Promotion Material, BBC WAC T53/115/1.
[361] The Ken Russell Festival Press Release, BBC WAC T53/115/1.
[362] Promotion Material, BBC WAC T53/115/1.
[363] The Ken Russell Festival Press Release, BBC WAC T53/115/1.
[364] Promotion Material, BBC WAC T53/115/1.

treatment he gives his subjects" and that his films are "allegedly documentary, but there is more imagination and fantasy in his films than those which set out be fantasies."[365] In an accompanying interview with Michael Caine in *The Radio Times*, Caine interprets the films are "an attack on the 'bourgeois rules' of society" and that "common to the six films is that they are about people who have tremendous setbacks in their lives but who overcome sheer adversity […] [which] may prove to be a pattern in Ken's life too."[366]

This construction was reinforced in the televised introductions written by the BBC and delivered by Michael Caine at the beginning of each film shown during the retrospective. These introductions repeated the narrative around Russell's contribution to the dramatisation of documentary in television and highlighted identifiable stylistic traits and recurrent themes. Beginning 'The Ken Russell Festival' with *A House in Bayswater*, Caine labels the films featured in the television retrospective as "documentaries with a difference" and that Ken Russell, "always to bring imagination and film technique to bear on the process of getting inside the characters he is studying".[367] *Prokofiev* was positioned as "the first of the now famous [Ken] Russell biographies of great artists" and the beginning of the "Russell technique" of combining established photographs and footage with specially shot material to "reflect both nature of that music and of the man who composed it."[368] Here, authorial exceptionalism through the generic innovation of the dramatised documentary is foregrounded.

The promotional material stresses the importance and significance of *Elgar*. A press release states along with it winning Russell his "first Screenwriter's Guild award back in 1962" it is also the 'most popular and most requested film Ken Russell has ever made."[369] Furthermore, "when it was first shown the critics took a very cool view of it, but it has already been repeated twice by popular demand."[370] And, "one side effect of the film was a tremendous boom in the sale of records of Elgar's music: new recordings were issued as a direct result of it".[371] This is repeated in Michal Caine's introduction commentary to *Elgar*, though he emphasises exceptionality further that it ought "to be the most successful film Ken Russell ever made" and

[365] Gay Search, 'A Festival of Ken Russell', *Radio Times* (179: 2328) (20 June 1968), 24.
[366] Search, 'A Festival of Ken Russell', 24.
[367] 'The Ken Russell Festival: Introduction notes to *A House in Bayswater* for Michael Caine', BBC WAC T53/115/1.
[368] The Ken Russell Festival: Introduction notes to *Prokofiev* for Michael Caine', BBC WAC T53/115/1.
[369] The Ken Russell Festival Press Release, BBC WAC T53/115/1.
[370] Press Release, BBC WAC T53/115/1.
[371] Press Release, BBC WAC T53/115/1.

the "readers of the *Observer* voted it second only to *That Was The Week That Was* as the most memorable of all television programmes of all time."[372] Furthermore, critical reception is noted in introductions delivered by Caine. For example, *Béla Bartók* is noted for being "ignored by the critics".[373]

Tension around Russell's reputation was represented in the divisive critical reception 'The Ken Russell Festival' received in the popular and quality press. For example, *The Daily Mirror*, believed the festival was "important as anything on television just now."[374] This contrasted with the view of *The Guardian*'s Stanley Reynolds who stated that the festival was simply "a pretentious way of presenting repeats."[375]

## 2.7. *A Song of Summer* (BBC One, 15 September 1968) and 'The Desmond Davis Award' (1969): artistic reputation and industry recognition

Following 'The Ken Russell festival' and the commercial and critical disappointment of *Billion Dollar Brain*, Ken Russell returned to the BBC with *Song of Summer*: a biography of the English composer Frederick Delius (Max Adrian). *Song of Summer* was co-written with Eric Fenby, played by Christopher Gable in *Song of Summer*, and adapted from his autobiography *Delius as I Knew Him*.[376]

Moreover, *Song of Summer* was conceived by the BBC as a prestige production with conditions set that clearable music had to be obtained and that it had to be both screened at films festivals and to international non-paying audiences.[377] Additionally, the BBC positioned a preferred institutional reading about *Song of Summer* through promotional material. Particularly, through *The Radio Times*. Alongside the reference to Russell's Screenwriters Guild Awards it

[372] Ken Russell Festival: Introduction to *Elgar* for Michael Cainer', BBC WAC T53/115/1
[373] Ken Russell Festival: introduction to *Béla Bartók* for Michaael Caine', BBC WAC, T53/115/1; 'Ken Russell Festival: introduction *Always on Sunday* for Michael Caine', BBC WAC T53/115/1.
[374] William Marshall, 'Last Night's View: At last David's flip Side: *The Ken Russell Festival* (BBC-1), *Daily Mirror* (11 July 1968), BFI press clippings.
[375] Stanley Reynolds, 'Television: *Omnibus*, *The Ken Russell Festival'*, *The Guardian* (3 July 1968), 6.
[376] Eric Fenby, Delius: As I Knew Him (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1936).
[377] Memo from Miss Heather Dean to H.M.A.P. Tel (23rd June 1968), BBC WAC T53/118/1.

emphasised that it was romantic a biography of a dying "great artist" but from the perspective of his Catholic amanuensis, Eric Fenby.[378]

During this period, institutional status and critical reputation both merge to construct an understanding of authorial reputation. Here, the critical reception adopted this institutional position and there was a consensus that Ken Russell was an exceptional talent that exhibited a specific style as a filmmaker. *Song of Summer* was measured against Russell's previous film *Dante's Inferno* (BBC One, 22 December 1967) which was considered, though Russell was praised as an artist in command of his medium, to be: undisciplined, excessive, and lacking in narrative.[379]

*Song of Summer* was received as a moving portrait of artistic temperament in the face of adversity. The positive critical reaction to *Song of Summer* was overwhelming, especially in its evaluation of Russell's discipline. Sean Day-Lewis of *The Daily Telegraph* believed *Song of Summer* "should do much to restore that wayward director's reputation" following *Dante's Inferno* which "suggested an excessive preoccupation with visual fireworks."[380] T.C. Worsley of the *Financial Times* felt that *Song of Summer* evidenced Russell as "one of the two or three (if not the) supreme practitioners of the art of Television" and again in relation to *Dante's Inferno*: "he can discipline his exuberant and fantastic imagination to the narrative needs."[381]

In *The Guardian,* cultural critic George Melly expanded on the merit of discipline in regard to situating it within a set of wider critical expectations. In his review of *Song of Summer*, Melly addressed Ken Russell's talent and argued that: "Russell's talent has never been in question but in the past, I've always felt it betrayed by the lack of restraint, smarty-boots vulgarity, an inability to resist beating the visual drum."[382] This "smarty-boots vulgarity" being a "handful

[378] 'Promotional Material: *Omnibus*, *A Song of Summer*', T53/118/4.
[379] Sean Day-Lewis, 'Television: Pre-Raphaelites elusive in striking film: *Dante's Inferno* (BBC.1)', *The Daily Telegraph* (23 December 1967), BFI press clippings; Keith Dewhurst, 'Russell's *Inferno* on BBC-1', *The Guardian* (23 December 1967), BFI press clippings; George Melly, 'Television: A failure of nerve: *Dante's Inferno* (BBC-1)', *The Observer* (24 December 1967), BFI press clippings; Maurice Wiggins, 'Television: *Dante's Inferno* (BBC 1)', *Sunday Times* (24 December 1967), BFI press clippings; T.C. Worsley, 'Television: In Total Command: *Dante's Inferno* (BBC 1)', *Financial Times* (21 December 1967), BFI press clippings.
[380] Sean Day-Lewis, 'Television: Delius Story Well Told: *Omnibus*, *A Song of Summer* (BBC.1)', *The Daily Telegraph* (16 September 1968), BFI press cuttings.
[381] T. C. Worsley, 'Television: The Last Summer of a Dying Genius: *Omnibus, A Song of Summer* (BBC1)', *Financial Times*, BBC WAC T53/118/4.
[382]George Melly, 'Television: The Delius-Fenby Masterpiece: On Ken Russell's *A Song of Summer* (BBC-1)', *The Observer*, (22 September 1968), BFI press clippings.

of unforgettable, completely magic images emerging from an agitated welter of chic tricks" and a biographical approach that reminded Melly "of those 'progressive' school-masters who imagine that the way to inculcate an interest in literature is to read out the 'dirty bits'".[383] Here, Melly argued that because of the restraining influence of Eric Fenby: "Russell's vices have been eliminated, his talent has stopped admiring its own ingenuity and signed its indentures in the services of art. […] Every speech, every image, every sequence contributed."[384] This sentiment was repeated by Henry Raynor in *The Times* that, despite Russell's tendency to "allow images to detach themselves from the matter in hand", *Song of Summer* "joins Mr. Russell's study of Elgar as a work which forces us to forgive him his occasional excesses".[385]

Moreover, Stanley Reynolds of *The Guardian* praised the BBC for allowing Ken Russell the space to the point where he believes he has become: "the only maker of television films whose work is instantly recognisable", and that he "is such a good film maker that he is able to constantly tread the narrow margin between exaggeration and real art."[386] Moreover, Reynolds argues that:

> The relationship between [Ken] Russell and the BBC would seem an ideal one. And one wonders if ever a commercial company will be able to produce such a relationship. As it now stands, no other company in Britain – perhaps the world – would allow a man such range as the BBC allows Russell.[387]

Reynolds statement is complemented in the popular press where Ken Russell is considered to be a television director who has elevated television as a medium. In *The Daily Mail,* Virginia Ironside reinforces Reynolds by arguing that Russell: "is one of the incredibly few original television talents – someone who has created a style all of his own in purely television". In *The Daily Express*, James Thomas reinforced this assessment and argued that Russell: "is one of the best film makers yet thrown up by the over-hurried world of TV", and is a "man who takes care to produce compulsive television, not merely, material with impact but with all the quality

[383] Melly, 'The Delius-Fenby Masterpiece', BFI press clippings.
[384] Melly.
[385] Henry Raynor, 'Television: *Delius*, subject of moving play: *Omnibus*, *A Song of Summer* (B.B.C.1)', *The Times* (16 September 1968), BFI press clippings.
[386] Stanley Reynolds, 'Television: *Omnibus, A Song of Summer (*BBC-1)', *The Guardian* (17 September 1968), BFI press clippings.
[387] Reynolds, '*A Song of Summer*', BFI press clippings.

of the cinema."[388] Additionally, *Song of Summer* was repeated the following year and Norman Swallow again praised it in the *Radio Times* as "Ken Russell's most moving and disciplined film" and states that with "each viewing [*Song of Summer*] seems to increase its stature. Which is as it should be with what is without any doubt, a work of art."[389]

Confirming Ken Russell's institutional-critical reputation, *Song of Summer* was able to acquire prestige and distinction for the BBC as it was submitted to the Sixth International Television Festival in Prague, where it won the main award, and was sold internationally; where it was transmitted on National Education Television in the United Sates (25 June 1969).[390] Moreover, the overwhelming positive critical reception of *Song of Summer* contributed to Russell's artistic reputation as an exceptional talent and the 'television-director-as-artist'. On the 14th February 1969, The Guild of Television Producers and Directors presented Russell with their highest achievement: 'The Desmond Davis Award', for his original contribution to the medium of television. Further confirming that Russell's reputation was constructed to legitimise television as a medium and to elevate television as a medium suitable for artistic self-expression.

## 2.8. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the development of Ken Russell's authorial reputation during the 1950s and 1960s. During this period, Russell developed both artistic and popular reputations as television director and established a public persona as he crossed-over from television to commercial cinema. Both Russell's institutional status and critical reputation engaged with the romantic author.

Ken Russell's artistic authorial reputation was an institutional-critical construction established on his 'exceptional talent' as an amateur filmmaker. At the BBC, Russell's reputation as the 'television-director-as-artist' centred on the medium and generic innovation through the development of the dramatisation of documentary. Primarily, through a series of television

[388] James Thomas, 'Television: Memorable – a story of a blind musician: *A Song of Summer* (BBC1)', *Daily Express* (17 September 1968), BBC WAC T53/118/4.
[389] *Radio Times* (183: 2377) (29 May 1969), BBC WAC T53/118/4.
[390] Memo from J.H. Stock to M.P.O. Tel (4th March 1969), BBC WAC T53/118/3.

biographies of artists and composers that pushed institutional boundaries that surrounded impartiality and historical representation. Furthermore, these television biographies engaged with the romantic concept of the author through the notion of the misunderstood and neglected artist which, in turn, reinforced Russell's own authorship. As the decade progressed, Russell was increasingly associated with cultural permissiveness, stylistic excess and waywardness. And as a consequence, Russell developed a popular reputation and public persona as 'The Wild Man of the BBC'.

This chapter has illustrated that Ken Russell's authorship was used as part of an institutional strategy for distinction and prestige, and a critical strategy for medium legitimisation. In an effort to legitimise their respective mediums and practices, the relationship between increasing critical reputation and rising institutional status was central to the development of Russell's institutional-critical reputation as the 'television-director-as-artist'. Russell's growing institutional status coincided with the liberal conception of public service broadcasting which – with institutional support from commissioning editors and management – permitted Russell increasing creative autonomy to both experiment with dramatisation and overcome institutional boundaries and controversies.

Through a comparative analysis of critical reception, this chapter has also defined the critical expectations, related to both Ken Russell's artistic and popular reputations, that will be referenced throughout the rest of his career. In the construction and development of Russell's authorial reputation, Russell is foregrounded in critical reception, and cohesive critical statements are made about him as a television director. Particularly, in relation to authorial talent, approach to the television biography as a genre, and directorial style. During this period, a series of critical expectations were established in the quality press in line with the standards and values of traditional criticism. For these television critics, a central concern was artistic-moral responsibility and the appropriateness of Russell's approach, style and tone for dramatising historical and biographical subjects with serious themes. Central to this was a concern for authorial judgement and taste; especially in relation to foregrounding directorial style and excess. Furthermore, the notion of talent becomes central to the critical evaluation of Russell.

Additionally, the dramatisation of documentary was critically divisive in the popular press. Particularly, the concern that authorial interpretation and foregrounding directorial style

overwhelmed the biographical subject and could lead to historical and biographical misrepresentation. In general, critics favoured an impartial approach in television documentary, a romantic approach to biography and a style that cohered with the biographical subject. A common criticism here was that Russell's television biographies said more about him than his subject-matter.

And lastly, Ken Russell's artistic institutional-critical reputation is also significant because it facilitated him to crossover from television into the commercial film industry several times throughout the 1960s. Moreover, the development of Russell's reputation represents what Dave Rollinson has identified as the influence of the director increasing in television hierarchies, as the medium shifted toward a more visual form of storytelling, during the 1960s.[391] Therefore, Russell's authorship was used to legitimise television during the 1960s as a medium suitable for artistic self-expression.

[391] Dave Rolinson, *Alan Clarke* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 153.

## 3. Becoming the *Enfant Terrible*: the fixing of Ken Russell's authorial reputation and public persona at the beginning of the 1970s

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the central development of Ken Russell's authorial reputation as he crossed-over from television into commercial cinema at the beginning of the 1970s. This chapter will focus on the most intense and controversial period of Russell's career when he reached a level of public notoriety. During this period, Russell's reputation became firmly associated with self-indulgent excess, negative critical reception and, in relation to contemporary debates about cultural permissiveness, controversy. Correspondingly, Russell developed a flamboyant and contrarian public persona which, considering he repeatedly stated his intention to shock, further reinforced critical divisiveness. Consequently, sustained public controversy and contrarian self-presentation, overwhelmed Russell's established artistic reputation into an 'appalling talent' and his public persona became fixed as an *enfant terrible*; labels that subsequently define critical and popular expectations about Russell for the rest of his career.

This chapter examines the central moment in Ken Russell's reputational development following the transmission of *Dance of the Seven Veils:* a *comic strip in 7 episodes on the life of Richard Strauss, 1864-1949* (BBC One, 15 February 1970), an experimental television biography of the German composer, and the release of *The Devils* (Ken Russell, 1971), an adaptation of John Whiting's play based on Aldous Huxley's novel *The Devils of Loudun* about the Loudon Possessions of 1634, which were both negatively received as controversial.[392] Furthermore, this chapter analyses the institutional response to Russell's increasing visibility in British popular culture as a film director.[393] In particular, this chapter assesses the contrast between Russell's contrarian appearance on the late-night television magazine programme *24 Hours* (BBC One, 22 July 1971), where he physically assaulted the *Evening Standard* film critic Alexander Walker, and his presentation as a serious filmmaker in the *Omnibus* (BBC Television, 1967-2003) documentary, *Russell's Progress* (BBC One, 25 July 1971).

[392] Aldous Huxley, *The Devils of Loudon* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1952); John Whiting, *The Devils* (London: Heinemann, 1961).

[393] During this period, Russell became saturated in metropolitan film culture. For example, *The Music Lovers* (Ken Russell, 1970), at the Odeon Haymarket, *The Devils* at the Warner-Rendezvous and *The Boy Friend* (1971) at the Empire in Leicester Square were simultaneously exhibited in their first-run engagement in the West End.

In line with the examination of Russell's reputation as a television director in Chapter One, this chapter also engages with Arthur Marwick's conceptualisation of the 'Long Sixties': the period of cultural transformation between 1958 and 1974, characterised by the redefinition of socio-cultural boundaries and hierarchies, and the renegotiation of public and private behaviour.[394] In regard to contemporary cultural discourse, the topicality of permissiveness is central to the construction of controversy during the period. Here, permissiveness centred around the moral limits of cultural boundaries. Particularly, around sexual behaviour and its media representation; which from a conservative viewpoint represented the erosion of traditional moral values.

Regarding the British film industry during the 'Long Sixties', American investment during the 1960s provided opportunities for emerging talent to cross-over from television into commercial cinema. In their re-evaluation of British film culture of the 1970s, Sue Harper and Justin Smith identified that American retrenchment in the late 1960s resulted in an economic vacuum and contradictory cultural space that permitted this talent to push the boundaries of commercial film practice that would not be tolerated in a healthier economic climate. This contradictory cultural space resulted in a cinema of contingency: characterised by caution and clumsiness, seen in the trend for spin-offs of television sitcoms, experimentation and ironic disavowal, where visual and performance styles carried a burden of meaning in excess of their narrative function, and the boundaries of permissible taste.[395] Furthermore, as a reaction to the liberalisation of the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC), under Secretary John Trevelyan, film censorship became a central feature in mainstream cultural discourse during this period.[396]

Coinciding with the construction and development of Ken Russell's authorial reputation, a central development in Anglo-American film culture during the 'Long Sixties' was the introduction of *auteurism* as a critical concept; and the resulting shift in the industrial and cultural status of the film director. Reinforcing the romantic conceptualisation of the author, the 'film-director-as-author' was increasingly foregrounded in film culture during the 1960s

[394] Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, 1958-1974* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 5-7.
[395] Sue Harper and Justin Smith (eds), *British Film Culture in the 1970s: The Boundaries of Pleasure* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 225-229, 232.
[396] Though the discourse of censorship is central to this period and Chapter Three, this thesis does not aim to recount the censorship history of *The Devils* in the United Kingdom. Alongside contemporary reports in the trade press, the BBFC's censorship of *The Devils* has been thoroughly examined in Phelps (1975) and recounted in Robertson (1989), Dewe Matthews (1994), and Lamberti (2014).

and by the early 1970s, the film director had become a fashionable figure in popular culture.[397] From an American perspective, Joseph Gelmis described this period as that of the "film director as superstar" and further popularised the *auteurist* narrative that a "new breed of personal film-maker" had emerged who were: "determined to make films their own and to maintain complete artistic control."[398] Here, it is important to note a national-cultural difference in Anglo-American film criticism in regard to *auteurism*. In contrast to American film criticism, Harper and Smith identified that traditional film critics in the British mainstream press increasingly accredited certain film directors with the visual style of their films but were largely reluctant to embrace *auteurism*.[399] An exception in the British mainstream press was the film critic for *The Times*, John Russell Taylor. For example, Taylor argued that "however you choose to interpret the term *auteur*, there can be no doubt that Ken Russell is one [because of his] complete consistency of vision", but on the grounds of taste: "it would be a bold man who therefore decided it was safe to leave his critical faculties in the foyer."[400]

Regarding critical reception and the 'Long Sixties', Harper and Smith identified that British film criticism maintained a coherent mode of address into the 1960s but with the expansion of film criticism, the rivalry between publications resulted in the development of conflicting critical communities and the emergence of niche taste cultures.[401] Despite this, film critics in the mainstream press largely continued as they had before: "to inform their readers about the latest mainstream film provision, and to express the distinctiveness of their own tastes."[402] As outlined in the thesis introduction, traditional criticism was structured from a broad humanist perspective around the taste, standard and values of literary criticism. Here, Harper and Smith described this form of criticism as: "unmethodical but mannerly [in] technique".[403] And as this chapter will examine, critical expectations of Ken Russell centred around authorial talent and taste, and style and artistic-moral responsibility in relation to permissibility. Primarily, a central concern for both television and film critics being the development of Russell's authorial

[397] Developed from the 18th Century, Andrew Bennett defined the conceptualisation of romantic author or artist as an exemplary and transcendent human "inspired by forces outside himself" to "produce works of originality and genius" and who are "original to such an extent that he will necessarily be neglected in his own time and only fully appreciate in the future, after his death" (Bennett, 2005: 59-60).
[398] Joseph Gelmis, *The Film Director as Superstar* (Secker & Warburg, 1971), 14.
[399] Harper and Smith, *British Film Culture in the 1970s*, 156-157.
[400] John Russell Taylor, 'Films: The artist as exhibitionist*: Savage Messiah*', *The Times* (15 September 1972), BFI press clippings.
[401] Harper and Smith, *British Film Culture in the 1970s*, 218.
[402] Harper and Smith, 218.
[403] Harper and Smith, 223.

approach and directorial style: considering his introduction of burlesque or 'sending-up' as a form of satire, and its appropriateness for serious historical and biographical subject-matter and themes.[404]

In examining the development of Ken Russell's reputation as he crossed-over from television into commercial cinema, this chapter expands on Kay Dickinson's and John Hill's research into the development of Russell's career at the BBC during the 1960s. In both of their examinations, Dickinson and Hill concluded that Russell reached the limits of dramatised documentary on television and television authorship with *Dance of the Seven Veils*.[405] Hill identified that prior to *Dance of the Seven Veils*, Russell's status as a special talent at the BBC had permitted him to overcome institutional tensions but to depart from BBC norms of documentary practice and the related values of 'impartiality' and 'good taste' with *Dance of the Seven Veils* pushed institutional boundaries to their limit.[406] Moreover, Dickinson argued that Russell's departure from the previous generations conservative value-systems and the "comfortable non-conformity" of television biographies such as *Elgar: Portrait of a Composer* (BBC Television, 11 November 1962) for *Monitor* (BBC Television, 1958-1965) and *A Song of Summer* (BBC One, 15 September 1968) for *Omnibus* (BBC One, 1967-2001) and to critique both the myth of the romantic artist as genius and the cultivation of cultural taste was to: "tinker with middle-class values, to illuminate their disintegration and infiltration instigated the drawing of a boundary line that left Russell on the outside for many years."[407]

Regarding *The Devils*, this chapter expands on Julian Petley's examination into the role sensationalist articles had in constructing controversy around the film and predisposing it to local censorship. Particularly, his examination of the critical reception of *The Devils* which he argued was uniformly hostile because the film failed to conform to the prescribed standards of the 'quality' criteria and the critical expectations around historical drama.[408] The 'quality

[404] This thesis uses the British definition of burlesque as an absurd or comically exaggerated imitation. Specifically, a form of parody that ridicules serious literary and dramatic work either by treating a serious subject in an undignified style, or by applying an elevated style to a trivial subject. Therefore, this thesis does not use the American definition of burlesque which is a form of comic entertainment that features exotic dance and striptease.

[405] Kay Dickinson, '"The Very New Can Only Come from the Very Old": Ken Russell, National Culture and the Possibility of Experimental Television at the BBC in the 1960s', in *Experimental British Television* (Mulvey and Sexton, eds.) (Manchester University Press, 2007); John Hill, ''Blurring the Lines between Fact and Fiction': Ken Russell, the BBC and 'Television Biography'', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* (12:4) (2015), 452–478.

[406] Hill, 'Blurring the Lines between Fact and Fiction', 453.

[407] Dickinson, 'The Very New Can Only Come from the Very Old', 75, 86, 87.

[408] Julian Petley, 'Witch-hunt: The Word, the Press and The Devils', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* (12:4) (2015), 527, 532.

criteria' being John Ellis's conceptualisation of traditional film criticism which valued: an unobtrusive style at the service of the narrative that correlated with subject-matter, serious subject-matter with a social purpose, and principles such as coherence, verisimilitude and restraint.[409] Particularly, that *The Devils* was not a serious study of its subject and was not sufficiently restrained but instead excessive: "a particularly damning indictment in the traditional critical lexicon".[410]

### 3.1. *Dance of the Seven Veils: a comic strip in 7 episodes on the life of Richard Strauss, 1864-1949* (BBC One, 15 February 1970): reception and response

As examined in the previous chapter, the construction and development of Ken Russell's artistic reputation as a television director during the 1960s represented an institutional and critical strategy to legitimise television as a medium through authorship: the 'television-director-as-artist'. Prior to the transmission of *Dance of the Seven Veils*, the BBC considered Russell to be their most distinguished director and television critics in the mainstream press considered him to be an exceptional talent; merited on artistic innovation in television arts programming with the development of dramatised documentary through a series of impressionistic and increasingly interpretative biographies of artists and composers. At the beginning of the 1970s, it was generally accepted that the dramatised documentary profile *Elgar*, about the composer Sir Edward Elgar, and the television biography *Song and Summer*, about the composer Frederick Delius were considered the high points of Russell's career. Both television biographies reproduced the romantic conception of the artist as outsiders who were misunderstood in their own lifetime. Additionally, Russell's institutional status at the BBC permitted greater creative agency to experiment with historical reconstruction and as the decade progressed, he increasingly adopted a contradictory approach to biographical representation. This approach drew on a number of literary and cinematic traditions, including: the approach taken in Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*, the themes of H. S. Ede's *Savage Messiah*, the experimentation of A. J. A. Symons's *The Quest for Corvo,*[411] the narrative

[409] John Ellis, 'Art, Culture and Quality: Terms for a Cinema in the Forties and the Seventies', *Screen* (1978), 9–50.
[410] Petley, 'Witch-hunt', 532.
[411] Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1918); H. S. Ede, *Savage Messiah: Biography of the Sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska* (London: William Heinemann, 1931); A. J. A. Symons, *The Quest for Corvo: An Experiment in Biography* (London: Cassell, 1934).

structure of *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941) and the focus on the 'Private Lives' of historical figures seen in Alexander Korda's series of biopics from the 1930s.[412]

*Dance of the Seven Veils*, an experimental television biography about the composer Richard Strauss, represents a significant moment in both the development of Ken Russell's approach to biographical representation and Russell's authorial reputation. Firstly, *Dance of the Seven Veils* is significant in regard to the development of Russell's biographical approach because its anachronistic approach to historical reconstruction and irreverent approach to biographical representation pushed institutional limits around the dramatised documentary and impartiality at the BBC. Specifically, the television biography as a legitimate mode of dramatised documentary. Compared to *Song of Summer*, Russell's previous television biography, the historical reconstruction and biographical representation in *Dance of the Seven Veils*, which included fantasy and the graphic representation of sex and violence, caused considerable controversy. And secondly, *Dance of the Seven Veils* is significant in the development of Russell's authorial reputation because it pushed the limits of television authorship in regard to the creative autonomy of high-status freelance writers-directors at the BBC in expressing themselves through artistic experimentation. Furthermore, *Dance of the Seven Veils* represented the shift from Russell's established artistic reputation toward his *popular* reputation associated with controversy.

At the BBC, *Dance of the Seven Veils* was conceived as a prestige colour production and commissioned on the basis of Ken Russell's established artistic reputation.[413] Russell's high institutional status permitted him a greater level of creative autonomy and experimentation. Therefore, Russell had the authority to reject a pre-written script about Richard Strauss by the radio broadcaster Henry Reed for a self-written treatment, which he devised from George R. Marek's *Richard Strauss: The Life of a Non-hero*, and which he subtitled: "a comic strip in 7 episodes on the life of Richard Strauss, 1864-1949".[414] As indicated by the subtitle, Russell decided to push the institutional boundaries around impartial balance in documentary to challenge the hagiographic approach and romantic conventions that had been established

[412] London Film Productions successful cycle of films biographies and historical dramas include: *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (Alexander Korda, 1933), *The Rise of Catherine the Great* (Paul Czinner, 1934) and Rembrandt (Alexander Korda, 1936). These films themselves were influenced by a series of German silent films directed by Ernst Lubitsch: *Madame DuBarry* (1919), *Anna Boleyn* (1920) and *The Loves of Pharaoh* (1922).
[413] Drafted letter from Lord Hill of Luton about *Dance of the Seven Veils*, BBC WAC T53/159/4.
[414] George R. Marek, *Richard Strauss: The Life of a Non-hero* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1967).

around the television biography.[415] Specifically, Russell decided to interpret the relationship between Strauss and his music in choreographic terms and adopted a 'comic strip', or burlesque approach, to caricature and satirise Strauss's egotism and political relationship with the Nazi regime through his own words and the heroes of his tone poems: Zarathustra, Don Quixote, and Don Juan.[416] Atypical for the BBC, Russell's institutional status permitted him to enter production without a shooting script and improvise, with the choreographer Terry Gilbert, on location which resulted in the budget increasing in line with daily production changes brought on by Russell's inspiration.[417]

*Dance of the Seven Veils* became associated with controversy even prior to its transmission. Despite the BBC's support for Ken Russell as a high-status filmmaker, they had reservations about Russell moving away from the established romantic conventions and expectations of the television biography and the potential misrepresentation of Strauss. Here, the BBC believed that scenes of a sexual nature and antisemitic violence would shock audiences and cause widespread comment.[418] Michael Billington's article 'The Biography to End All Biographies' for *The Times*, contributed to institutional apprehension around *Dance of the Seven Veils*. Particularly, in regard to contrarian statements made by Russell about his authorial intentions. Here, Russell explains that it was his intention to satirise the romantic conventions of the television biography and in 'sending-up' Strauss, make a serious statement about artistic responsibility:

> One of the reasons I want to do this film was that I'm sick of imitations of *Elgar* with poets stumbling over ferns while they write. Here I hope we're doing the biography to end all biographies. Amongst other things the film is a great satire on the way television now treats artists and their lives. They take people too seriously. They're too reverential. These artists did some ridiculous things. We're not afraid to send Strauss up just as we're not afraid to let him speak for himself. [419]

[415] Letter from Ken Russell to Henry Reed (20th March 1969), BBC WAC T53/159/2; Letter from Ken Russell to Carlton Hobbs (21st March 1969), BBC WAC T53/159/2.
[416] Additionally, Russell foregrounds in *Dance of the Seven Veils* that it is his interpretation of Strauss. For example, Russell makes a cameo conducting the adagio from the *Symphonia Domestica* while Strauss has sexual relations with his wife in bed.
[417] Production began with a detailed treatment written by Russell (i.e., a structure divided into seven episodes). The projected budget of *Dance of the Seven Veils*, including a contingency, was estimated at £12,000 but accidental and deliberate overspending resulted in a final predicted expenditure of £20,000 (John Culshaw to Controller BBC1, 2nd April 1969, BBC WAC T53/159/1; Judith Harry to HMP Tel., 18th August 1969, BBC WAC T53/159/1).
[418] Lord Hill drafted letter, BBC WAC T53/159/4.
[419] Michael Billington, 'The Biography to End All Biographies', *The Times* (12 July 1969), 19.

Similarly, Russell also stated that it was his intention with *Dance of the Seven Veils* to make a statement about audience responsibility: "the film is really a criticism of the English and their attitude to art and politics in that they have such conveniently short memories. The political stance gets forgotten while the music remains."[420] Furthermore, these contrarian statements about authorial intentions established the terms of reference which subsequently circulated in the post-transmission discourse around *Dance of the Seven Veils*.

The contrarian statements made in 'The Biography to End All Biographies' can be considered controversial because they alerted the Strauss estate, represented by Dr. Ernest Roth of the music publisher Boosey & Hawkes, to potential misrepresentation. Initially, the Strauss estate threatened to withdraw the licensing of Strauss's music from the BBC if they believed *Dance of the Seven Veils* defamed Strauss.[421] As the BBC prioritised their relationship with Boosey & Hawks, the BBC defended *Dance of the Seven Veils* as "designed to express the truth of one artist as seen by another [artist]" and on the side of caution, the BBC advised Russell to avoid Strauss's music wherever possible following a preview in which the Strauss Estate neither raised objections nor granted formal approval.[422]

The BBC also decided to limit further advance publicity. Anticipating a divisive response to *Dance of the Seven Veils*, the BBC foregrounded in its affiliated publications that the film was a subjective impression of Strauss and departed from the romanticism of Ken Russell's previous biographies. Yet the coverage of *Dance of the Seven Veils* in *The Listener* and the *Radio Times* undermined the institutional agenda-setting around the film being a balanced documentary representation.[423] For example, *The Radio Times*' description of Russell as the BBC's "most striking and original director" and *Dance of the Seven Veils* as a "brilliant entertainment as well as a landmark in the development of the medium" was undermined by contrarianism.[424] In an accompanying interview with Anne Chisholm, Russell declared "you

[420] Billington, 'The Biography to End All Biographies', 19.
[421] Lord Hill of Luton, draft letter about *Dance of the Seven Veils*, BBC WAC T53/159/4; Letter from Dr E. Roth to R.G. Walford (29th July 1969), BBC WAC T53/159/4.
[422] Memo from R.G. Walford to Ken Russell (22nd July 1969), BBC WAC T53/159/4; Letter from Dr E. Roth to R.G. Walford, (29th July 1969), BBC WAC T53/159/4; Memo from John Culshaw to Head of Publicity (30th September 1969), BBC WAC T53/159/4; Letter from Dr E. Roth to John Culshaw (13th November 1969), BBC WAC T53/159/4.
[423] Phillipa Reid, 'Kensington gore comes to Cumberland', *The Listener* (19 February 1970), 248-249; Anne Chisholm, 'Russelling-up Strauss', *Radio Times*, 12 February 1970, BBC WAC T53/159/1.
[424] Chisholm, 'Russelling up Strauss', BBC WAC T53/159/1.

don't have to be dull to be profound" and that he interpreted Strauss through his own statements which he believed showed him to be "a very vulgar person, socially and culturally" who neglected his artistic responsibility.[425] Furthermore, Phillipa Reid in *The Listener* recounted of her experience on location with *Dance of the Seven Veils* in the article 'Kensington Gore comes to Cumbria'.[426] Here, Reid disseminated an impression of an excessive production at the whim of Russell's status as a television director.[427]

### 3.1.1. *Dance of Seven Veils*: the critical reception of *Dance of the Seven Veils*

*Dance of the Seven Veils* was transmitted on BBC One on the 15th February 1970. It subsequently received a negative reception and caused considerable controversy. Regarding television criticism and the critical reception of *Dance of the Seven Veils*, critical discourse centred around: the BBC's institutional responsibility as a public service broadcaster and Ken Russell's moral-artistic responsibility; the appropriateness of experimentation in the television arts documentary and balanced representation; and the representation of sex and violence on television in relation to the cultural discourse of permissiveness. In comparison to *Song of Summer*, *Dance of the Seven Veils* was considered to: neither meet the critical conventions of dramatised documentary nor those of television biography; and Russell was considered to impose his interpretation on the historical and biographical subject-matter. Particularly, as critics valued a romantic approach to biography, verisimilitude in historical reconstruction and balanced historical representation. Furthermore, Russell was considered to undermine his artistic reputation through authorial self-indulgence and his intention to shock.

Specifically, the critical discourse centred around a significant development in Ken Russell's authorial approach to dramatised documentary: the adoption of burlesque as a form of satire to 'send-up' the established romantic conventions of television biography and provide critical or ironic commentary, through abridgement and anachronism of the biographical subject and historical period.[428] For reference, David Robinson identified that Russell's burlesque was

[425] Chisholm, 'Russelling up Strauss', BBC WAC T53/159/1.
[426] Reid, 'Kensington Gore Comes to Cumberland'.
[427] Reid.
[428] As part of his experimentation with dramatisation, Russell had intended to incorporate burlesque earlier. According to Melvyn Bragg's original treatment 'Rousseau and Jarry', *Always on Sunday* (BBC1, 29 June 1965) had been intended to be presented as a burlesque theatrical performance 'The Fantastic Life of Henri Rousseau aided and abetted by that incomparable

informed by L. du Garde Peach's historical and biographical dramatisation for the *Children's Hour* (BBC Home Service, 1922-1964).[429] Here, Robinson observed that Russell had developed an approach that: "puts together all the conventions and cliches of a genre, the dramatic biography, as it has developed over the years on radio […] film and television".[430] Moreover, Robinson argued that Russell "revives the venerable tradition of the Victorian burlesque" and defined this as "in the manner of J. R. Planaché and H. J. Byron, which consisted of taking familiar stories or historic personages and impertinently doing them over in anachronistic modern idiom."[431] In regard to traditional criticism, burlesque was considered inappropriate for biographical and historical drama because it was not sufficiently a serious approach and trivialised subject-matter. Regarding the critical reception of *Dance of the Seven Veils*, the authorial intention behind burlesque and its appropriateness for serious historical and biographical subject-matter and themes was a central concern. Here, this burlesque approach, which incorporated historical abridgment, anachronism and fantasy combined with an intention to shock, was considered the inappropriate authorial approach, style and tone for serious historical reconstruction and biographical representation. Furthermore, this approach was considered to trivialise, distort and defame serious historical and biographical subject-matter.

Rather than simple condemnation, the critical reception of *Dance of the Seven Veils* was more nuanced when considering the personal sensibilities of individual critics, including their distaste, alongside the underlining standards and values of traditional criticism. In the quality press, television critics framed their evaluations in regard to engaging with Ken Russell's artistic-moral responsibilities in relation to his established artistic reputation and his parallel popular reputation for waywardness. Here, a central concern was the authorial intention behind burlesque and its implications for historical and biographical representation - especially in regard to historical verisimilitude and serious subject-matter and theme.

Buffoon and midget Alfred Jarry' in the style Jarry's play *Ubo Roi* (BBC WAC T32/1098/2). A more conventional form of television biography was pursued, and burlesque was incorporated into *Don't Shoot the Composer* (BBC1, 9 January 1966).

[429] The foundational literature about Russell was largely written from a North American perspective and therefore, neither references nor expands on the established definitions and assessments made in British criticism. Consequently, scholarship has overwhelmingly reproduced Joesph Gomez's conceptualisation of Russell's biographical approach consisting of a 'tripartite structure' (Gomez, 1976: 35).

[430] David Robinson, 'Films: *Savage Messiah*', *Financial Times* (15 September 1972), BFI press clippings.

[431] David Robinson, 'The Arts: Liszt in the burlesque tradition: *Lisztomania*', *The Times* (15 November 1975), BFI press clipping.

In *The Times* and *The Observer*, *Dance of the Seven Veils* was reviewed from the perspectives of both the television and music critics in a strategy to assert critical authority. As film and television critic for *The Observer*, George Melly was primarily concerned with Ken Russell's artistic-moral responsibility. In 'The War Between Russell and Strauss', Melly stated that Russell: "is usually a serious artist and always a great talent" but "for a man who could make a film as sensitive as his previous essay on Delius, this was an inexplicable fall".[432] In comparison to *Song of Summer*, Melly considered *Dance of the Seven Veils* to be "a disgusting film, not because it was honest about sex and violence" but because Russell had used Strauss as "an excuse for a baroque exercise in outrage, while at the same time faking a serious purpose": a superficial "plea for the artist's commitment to social responsibility".[433] As film critic for *The Times*, John Russell Taylor considered *Dance of the Seven Veils* to be a hateful film that neither worked as a biography nor comedy because the 'comic strip' trivialised the film's subject-matter.[434] For example, "the effect of the Straussian hero as a boot-fetishist out of Stroheim, or as a Macbeth goosed by his Lady's dagger, is painfully like end-of-term frolics at some rather liberal prep school."[435] Similarly, Nancy Banks-Smith in *The Guardian* considered *Dance of the Seven Veils* to be cruel, but acknowledged that the film was intended to be a "high camp and Heinz ketchup sendup of Richard Strauss".[436] Furthermore, Banks-Smith argued that the graphic imagery of "rowdy nuns [and] endless orchestrated orgasms" resulted in the film becoming bawdy: "a sort of '*Carry On* Conducting".[437] And in regard to moral-artistic responsibility, Melly concluded that Russell "risked nothing, taught us nothing and, despite many genuinely funny moments, produced a work as morally dead as what it was attacking."[438]

Rather than outright condemnation, a central concern for the music critics of *The Times* and *The Observer*, William Mann and Peter Heyworth, was to correct factual and biographical errors. Particularly, in regard to Strauss's status as composer in Nazi Germany and charges of antisemitism. In *The Observer*, Peter Heyworth acknowledged that Strauss was an opportunist

[432] George Melly, 'Television: The War Between Russell and Strauss: *Omnibus, Dance of the Seven Veil*s (BBC-1)', *The Observer* (22 February 1970), BFI press clippings.
[433] Melly, 'The War Between Russell and Strauss', BFI press clippings. .
[434] John Russell Taylor, 'The Arts: An object of hate: *Omnibus, Dance of the Seven Veil*s (BBC 1)'', *The Times* (16 February 1979), BFI press clippings.
[435] Taylor, 'An object of hate', BFI press clippings.
[436] Nancy Banks-Smith, 'Television: *Dance of the Seven Veils* on BBC1', *The Guardian* (16 February 1970), BFI press clippings.
[437] Nancy Banks-Smith, 'Dance of the Seven Veils on BBC1', BFI press clippings.
[438] Melly, 'The War Between Russell and Strauss'.

who regarded composition as a business and therefore, "sending him up isn't underserved but [Ken] Russell has approached him with hatred" and this had produced a "posthumous character assassination of the meanest and most unscrupulous sort […] not only cheap in manner but nasty in intent".[439] Here, Heyworth identifies that *Dance of the Seven Veils* is "caricature rather than biography, so as to take refuge behind the license it permits. But to be effective caricature he has to be recognisable and that demands facts".[440] And in regard to artistic responsibility, Heyworth concluded that *Dance of the Seven Veils* reflected back-on Russell because: "hatred can also serve as a form of auto-criticism, and as such is liable to cast more light on the author than his victim".[441] Correspondingly, William Mann in *The Times* argued that Russell abandoned his responsibilities and "has used all his skill and imagination to make audiences infer the worst, even to the extent of passing off calumnious invention as near-history".[442] Here, Mann argued that the biography was "all fantasy, but about Ken Russell, not about Strauss" and was a "vulgar-horror comic about a lascivious mercenary ogre" as ""credible and informative as the scene in which Hitler plays the piano while Strauss dances on top of it, playing the violin."[443] Regarding biographical insight, the critic for *The Sun* was an outlier in as much as: "[you] may not have learnt too much about the real Strauss from it, but you certainly learned a lot about Russell. The man is simply, a genius."[444]

In the popular press, critics more readily engaged with the discourse of permissiveness and foregrounded what they considered to be the 'shocking' aspects of *Dance of the Seven Veils*. Critics foregrounded their distaste at the critical or 'savage' approach to biographical and historical subject-matter, and historical anachronism. Particularly, the graphic representation of violence and eroticism was deemed too vulgar for television. In the *Daily Express*, James Thomas considered *Dance of the Seven Veils* to be "the most startling and brutal ever seen on television" and argued that it was "designed to shock deeply" with "moments of intolerable savagery" that "moved too far into fantasy".[445] In *The Daily Mail*, John Moorehead argued *Dance of the Seven Veils* was a "savage cartoon" rather than a 'comic strip' because it

[439] Peter Heyworth, 'Music: Approached with hatred: *Omnibus*, *Dance of the Seven Veils* (BBC-1)', *The Observer* (22 February 1970), BFI press clippings.
[440] Heyworth, 'Approached with hatred', BFI press clippings.
[441] Heyworth.
[442] William Mann, 'Music: … and William Mann with the facts: *Omnibus*, *Dance of the Seven Veils* (BBC 1)', *The Times* (16 February 1970), BFI press clippings.
[443] Mann, '… and William Mann with the facts', BFI press clippings.
[444] Anon., 'Television: *Omnibus*, *Dance of the Seven Veils*', *The Sun*, BBC WAC T53/159/3.
[445] James Thomas, 'Television: Savage! It Must Shock You: *Omnibus*, *Dance of the Seven Veils*', *Daily Express* (16 February 1970), BBC WAC T53/159/3.

represented Strauss as an "obsessed egoist and would-be superman".[446] In his review for the *Daily Mirror*, Matthew Coady foregrounded his own distaste: "the sight of nuns in sexual frenzy, a glimpse of the brutal soldiery engrossed in rape, the slaughter of a child, and a touch of blood sacrifice are not my cup of cocoa".[447] Furthermore, Coady argued that it was a "fantasy built around Strauss" but it was "a pity that in the process he [Ken Russell] felt it necessary to lean on equally hackneyed images from the dimmer kind of horror comic".[448]

Despite an overall negative critical response to *Dance of the Seven Veils*, individual critics did nonetheless also find some positive aspects. As indicated in the critical reception above, critical nuance was centred around a consideration of Ken Russell's artistic reputation and disappointment in regard to misplaced talent. Typically expressed through a back-handed compliment, positive aspects concerned technique. For example, James Thomas in the *Daily Express*, argued that he "was disturbed – but technically impressed […] however brilliant the technique and camerawork it was dreadful in its brutality."[449] In *The Sunday Times*, Maurice Wiggins found *Dance of the Seven Veils* to be "rather disgusting" and resented the "liberties Mr Russell took with my sensibilities" but held the BBC responsible for offering the "act of copulation as public entertainment".[450] However, Wiggins felt it unfair to single Russell out as: "the only purveyor of shock and horror. He is merely the most brilliant and most wayward."[451] Instead, Wiggins found *Dance of the Seven Veils* to be "often very funny indeed, and always electric" and concluded, that Russell was "incapable of a dull moment."[452] Similarly, Sean Day-Lewis argued in *The Daily Telegraph* that: "his comedy is as heavy as that of Strauss and more obvious, but his uninhibited delight in the use of a camera leads as ever to extraordinary images. He is never dull."[453] Though, he concluded: "to judge a man so harshly from lack of courage, argues a dangerous self-confidence."[454] Regarding authorial

[446] John Moorehead, 'TV: *Omnibus*, *A Comic Strip in Seven Episodes* (BBC 1)', *The Daily Mail* (17 February 1970), BFI press clippings.
[447] Matthew Coady, 'TV: A comic strip in murder, mayhem and music: *Omnibus*, *Dance of the Seven Veils*', *Daily Mirror* (16 February 1970), BFI press clippings.
[448] Coady, 'A comic strip in murder, mayhem and music', BFI press clippings.
[449] Thomas, 'Savage! It Must Shock You', BBC WAC T53/159/3.
[450] Maurice Wiggins, 'Television: That was the week: *Omnibus*, *Dance of the Seven Veils* (BBC 1)', *The Sunday Times*, BBC WAC T53/159/3.
[451] Wiggins, 'That was the week', BBC WAC T53/159/3.
[452] Wiggins, BBC WAC T53/159/3.
[453] Sean Day-Lewis, 'Television: Savage View of Strauss: *Omnibus*, *Dance of the Seven Veils* (BBC 1)', *The Daily Telegraph* (16 February 1970), BFI press clippings.
[454] Day-Lewis, 'Savage View of Strauss', BFI press clippings.

talent, John Russell Taylor concluded that Russell's "talent is equalled only by his gift for misusing it — but to what end remains, finally, shrouded in mystery."[455]

### 3.1.2. *Dance of the Seven Veils*: the public and institutional reception of *Dance of the Seven Veils*

Throughout the 1960s, television increasingly became an area of concern and controversy for moral conservatives and the press in relation to the cultural discourse around the 'permissive society'. As anticipated, *Dance of the Seven Veils* caused considerable controversy on its transmission with its popular reception in the press centred on the contemporary discourse of cultural permissiveness. Particularly, in relation to the liberalisation of the BBC and its moral responsibility as a public service broadcaster. In 1964, the moral campaign around television consolidated around the 'Clean-up TV' campaign and foregrounded moral campaigner Mary Whitehouse: who went to establish the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association (NVLA). For individuals like Whitehouse, the increasing graphic representation of sex and violence on television represented permissiveness and both cultural and moral decline. Therefore, the BBC as an institution was concerned with its editorial responsibility as a public service broadcaster in relation to public taste and what was considered permissible.

Regarding audience reception, the BBC's Audience Research Report indicates that *Dance of the Seven Veils* was divisive. While some of the audience considered *Dance of the Seven Veils* to be an achievement in accordance with Ken Russell's artistic reputation, a significant portion found it to be a "savage and vitriolic attack" of one artist toward another that defamed Strauss "in the most vulgar light" and "offended against good taste".[456] This divisiveness was not accounted for in the press reception of *Dance of the Seven Veils*. Sensationalist reporting increased the controversy around *Dance of the Seven Veils*. For example, the *Daily Sketch* reported that following the transmission of *Dance of the Seven Veils:* "protests poured into the BBC last night after some of the most suggestive sex scenes even on TV."[457]

[455] Taylor, 'An object of hate'.
[456] BBC Audience Research Department, 'Audience Research Report: *Dance of the Seven Veils*' (3 March 1970), BBC WAC T53/159/1.
[457] Douglas Marlborough and Shaun Usher, 'BBC in Row over "Too Sexy" TV Film'', *Daily Sketch* (16 February 1970), BFI Press Clippings.

As General-Secretary of the NVLA, Mary Whitehouse was mobilised in the popular press in opposition to *Dance of the Seven Veils*.[458] Initially, Whitehouse complained that *Dance of the Seven Veils* was "obscene and pornographic" and threatened legal action against the General Post Office for transmitting pornography.[459] In Michael Borissow's article for *The Daily Sketch*, 'Has TV gone too far?', both Whitehouse and Ken Russell clarified their position on *Dance of the Seven Veils* in opposing columns.[460] Whitehouse questioned the moral position of the BBC and argued the "excessive" imagery of sex and violence offended "good taste and decency" and that "people are getting sick and tired of this kind of filth on the screens and one has to ask whether the BBC is deliberately trying to deprave."[461] In contrast, Russell compared Whitehouse's moral campaign to fascism and argued *Dance of the Seven Veils* was about both the moral responsibility of the artist and audience. Here, Russell argued Strauss "could have raised his voice and perhaps prevented some of the horrors against the Jews but he did nothing" and this paralleled with the television audience "refusing to admit they are surrounded by dangerous political situations."[462]

The BBC defended *Dance of the Seven Veils* against press criticism and public controversy. Here, a letter credited to Chairmen of the BBC Governors, Lord Charles Hill, and written with assistance from David Attenborough, Director of Television Programming was circulated.[463] This letter defended their right to commission *Dance of the Seven Veils* based on Ken Russell's established artistic reputation because of the talent he demonstrated with *Elgar* and *Song of Summer* and that: "directors with his kind of distinguished reputation expect and are given a higher degree of freedom than others whose abilities have been less frequently or less well demonstrated."[464] Furthermore, the letter defended the authored dramatised documentary as a legitimate mode of television arts programming because the caricature was supported by

[458] That month Russell and Whitehouse also discussed *Dance of the Seven Veils* on *The World at One* (BBC Radio 4, 1965-) and the following year, Whitehouse litigated against the BBC and Russell for him calling her a "fascist" on *Film Night* (BBC1, 28 February 1971) (NVLA Archive File D, Boxes 67-68).
[459] Robert Hart, '"Sex and Sadism" TV Film Angers Tory MPs', *The Sun* (17 February 1970), BBC WAC T53/159/3; Ken Irwin, '"Clean Up TV" Group May Sue Post Office', *Daily Mirror* (17 February 1970), BFI press clippings; Brian Dean, 'Post Office "may be sued" over BBC Strauss Film', *Daily Mail* (17 February 1970), BFI press clippings.
[460] Michael Borissow, 'Has TV gone too far?", *Daily Sketch* (17 February 1970), BBC WAC T53/159/3.
[461] Michael Borissow, 'Has TV gone too far?", *Daily Sketch*.
[462] Michael Borissow, 'Has TV gone too far?", *Daily Sketch*.
[463] Lord Charles Hill was the Chairmen of the BBC Governors from 1967 to 1972. This letter was drafted with assistance from David Attenborough.
[464] Lord Hill, draft letter about *Dance of the Seven Veils*, BBC WAC T53/159/4.

historical evidence and the graphic representation was justified because it was critical of "unrestrained sensuality".[465]

The BBC further defended the transmission of *Dance of the Seven Veils* publicly in Parliament. Prompted by the contemporary discourse around cultural permissiveness and the topical debate around what was permissible on television, the Conservative MP for Bromsgrove, James Dance, brought a parliamentary motion against *Dance of the Seven Veils*. Reported in the press, Dance argued the "viciousness, savagery, and brutality" of *Dance of the Seven Veils* – particularly, the representation of sexual violence and antisemitism – was "an affront to those who believe in the Christian religion" and called for an inquiry into violent television programmes from the Telecommunications Minister, the Labour and Co-Operative MP for Wednesbury, John Stonehouse.[466] Receiving less press attention, *Dance of the Seven Veils* was subsequently screened in the House of Commons and defended by David Attenborough and Huw Wheldon, now Managing Director of the BBC. In retrospect, MPs did not find *Dance of the Seven Veils* particularly shocking and amended the motion to congratulate "the British Broadcasting Corporation and Mr. Ken Russell on their skill and courage in presenting such a powerful and thought-provoking portrait of Richard Strauss."[467]

Privately, the BBC's Board of Management was divided over defending the right to produce and transmit *Dance of the Seven Veils*. BBC Management recognised *Dance of the Seven Veils* as a "work of astonishing invention and substantial creative imagination" but found it difficult to reach a consensus.[468] Regarding editorial standards, a primary concern for BBC Management was institutional supervision and neither wanting to inhibit the artist nor endorse vanity projects. While defending *Dance of the Seven Veils* in the House of Commons, Huw Wheldon was privately concerned that Ken Russell had abused the freedom his status afforded him to indulge his fantasies. On the other hand, Charles Curran, the Director-General of the BBC, felt the eroticism and violence was contextual and thus permissible and the BBC were

[465] Lord Hill, draft letter about *Dance of the Seven Veils*, BBC WAC T53/159/4.
[466] Francis Boyd, 'Show on BBC "Brutal"', *The Guardian* (17 February 1970), BBC WAC T53/159/3; Hart, 'Sex and Sadism', BBC WAC T53/159/3.
[467] Anon. ('Our Television Staff), 'MPs to See Seven Veils Documentary', *The Daily Telegraph* (28 February 1970), BBC WAC T53/159/3; Anon. 'MPs unruffled by Russell film', *The Guardian* (5 March 1970), BBC WAC T53/159/3; George Clark, 'Russell film defended by BBC Chief', *The Times* (5 March 1970), BFI press clippings; David Steel MP, 'Strauss in the House', *The Guardian* (9 March 1970), BFI press clippings; House of Commons, 'Extract from Notices of Questions and Motions' (18 February 1970), BBC WAC T53/159/4.
[468] BBC Board of Management, 'TV Weekly Programme Review Meeting: *Dance of the Seven Veils*' (18 February 1970), T62/5/1.

correct to defend it.[469] Despite this division, BBC Management concluded that Russell was talented but as *Dance of the Seven Veils* had been designed to shock, his sensibilities had departed him.[470] Furthermore, it would not have been transmitted if it were made by a filmmaker without his reputation.[471] Additionally, BBC Management considered that Russell set a bad example for young producers in courting controversy. Here, John Culshaw believed that Russell's contrarian statements were made "almost as though he wanted the BBC to ban the work."[472]

While BBC Management concluded that it was right to transmit *Dance of the Seven Veils*, it was the response of the Strauss Estate had the most significant impact on *Dance of the Seven Veils*.[473] The Strauss Estate concluded *Dance of the Seven Veils* was defamatory and as a result decided to withdraw the copyright to the music and requested it be withdrawn from circulation.[474] In response, a copyright restriction was placed on *Dance of the Seven Veils*. Additionally, John Culshaw invited Dr. Ernst Roth to address the representation of Strauss in *Dance of the Seven Veils* on *Music Now* (BBC Two, 15 March 1970) and assured the Strauss Estate that *Dance of the Seven Veils* would not be repeated.[475] This restriction lasted until the copyright for Strauss's music expired and the film was screened publicly once again at the Keswick Film Festival in February 2020.

Following its withdrawal from circulation, *Dance of the Seven Veils* has acquired the reputation as a 'banned' text, with Ken Russell being assumed to have been blacklisted by the BBC. Despite Russell not making another programme for the BBC until *The Mystery of Dr Martinu* (BBC Two, 16 May 1992), there is little evidence that Russell became a *persona non grata* at the BBC following *Dance of the Seven Veils*.[476] In fact, he became a regular contributor to the

[469] BBC Board of Management, 'Programme Matters: *Dance of the Seven Veils*' (18 February 1970), T62/5/1.
[470] Board of Management, 'TV Weekly Programme Review Meeting: *Dance of the Seven Veils*', T62/5/1.
[471] Board of Management, 'TV Weekly Programme Review Meeting: *Dance of the Seven Veils*', T62/5/1.
[472] Board of Management, 'TV Weekly Programme Review Meeting: *Dance of the Seven Veils*, T62/5/1; Board of Management, 'Programme Matters: *Dance of the Seven Veils*, T62/5/1.
[473] BBC Board of Management, Minutes of Meeting (02/03/1970), BBC WAC R78/2658/1.
[474] Letter from E. Roth to John Culshaw (17 February 1970), BBC WAC T53/159/4.
[475] Letter from John Culshaw to E. Roth (18 February 1970), BBC WAC T53/159/4; Memo from John Culshaw to Pamela Nash (20 February 1970), BBC WAC T53/159/4; Nicholas de Jongh, 'No Repeat for Strauss', *The Guardian* (6 March 1970), BBC WAC T53/159/3.
[476] Despite not making another film for *Omnibus* (BBC, 1967-2003), Russell was still associated with the series. Alongside repeat transmissions of *Song of Summer* (BBC1, 15/09/1968; BBC1, 01/07/1969; BBC1, 27/05/1973; BBC2, 09/06/1984; BBC1, 26/01/1993; BBC4, 18/08/2025), Russell did feature in several *Omnibus* documentaries from the 1970s onwards: *Whatever Turns You On, or Variations on a noisy theme* (BBC1, 7/05/1972) about personal responses to music; *Lotte Lenya* (BBC1, 24/05/1979) with extracts from *Lotte Lenya Sings Kurt Weil* (BBC TV, 26/03/1961); *Huw Wheldon: by His Friends*

BBC and throughout the 1970s, tried to establish productions at the BBC.[477] Instead, Russell focused on his film career because it was where there was finance and eventually returned to television arts programming in the late 1970s. Here, Russell received patronage from commercial television with *Clouds of Glory* (Granada Television, July 1978), biographies of the Lake Poets William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and began a successful relationship with the *South Bank Show* (London Weekend Television, 1978-2010).

In conclusion, *Dance of the Seven Veils* influenced subsequent critical and popular expectations in relation to Ken Russell's biographical approach: either the romantic approach of *Elgar* and *Song of Summer* or the 'savage' burlesque approach of *Dance of the Seven Veils.* Furthermore, the critical reception and controversy that surrounded the transmission of *Dance of the Seven Veils* combined with that of *The Music Lovers* (Ken Russell, 1971)[478] informed the reception of Russell's subsequent film: *The Devils*. Additionally, *Dance of the Seven Veils* reputation as a controversial 'banned' text has reinforced *The Devils* own reputation as a 'banned' text and contributed to Russell's later reputation as a cult filmmaker.

### 3.2. ***The Devils***

*The Devils* was an adaptation of John Whiting's theatrical adaptation[479] of Aldous Huxley's documentary novel *The Devils of Loudon* about the historical events that surrounded the Loudon Possessions of 1634.[480] The controversy that surrounded the production and release of *The Devils* is significant because it represents the central moment in the development of Ken Russell's authorial reputation where he firmly became associated with self-indulgent excess

(BBC1, 11/04/1986), a posthumous tribute to Sir Huw Wheldon (1916-1986); *Video Jukebox* (BBC1, 9/05/1986; BBC2, 11/06/1987) about the development of the music video. Additionally, *The Music Lovers* was transmitted following *Omnibus: Who Killed Tchaikovsky?* (BBC1, 7/12/1993).

[477] In 1972, Russell approached the BBC with an adaptation of Georges Neveux's play *Juliette, or The Key of Dreams,* titled *The Angels*. While the BBC declined this offer, an attempt was made to acquire the rights Henry Greene's *Loving* after the Corporation were unable to secure the rights to A. J. A. Symons's *The Quest for Corvo* (BBC WAC T62/5/1).

[478] *The Music Lovers* premiered on British terrestrial television as part of 'Glenda Jackson in …' (BBC2, 27/09/1981) and has been repeated several times thereafter: BBC2, 02/08/1984; *Moviedrome*: BBC 2, 28/07/1991; BBC1, 07/12/1993.

[479] The Royal Shakespeare Company's production of John Whiting's *The Devils* was profiled on *Monitor* (BBC, 26 February 1961). Russell stated he has seen this production, and it is the reason he cast Dorothy Tutin in *Savage Messiah* (Ken Russell, 1972). Furthermore, Whiting's play had been previously adapted by Krzysztof Penderecki as an opera titled *The Devils of Loudon* (1969) which was staged at the London Coliseum by the Sadler's Wells Company in 1973.

[480] Whiting, *The Devils*; Huxley, *The Devils of Loudon*.

and the intention to shock, controversy and negative critical reception. Furthermore, sustained authorial self-indulgence and controversy following *Dance of the Seven Veils* resulted in the assessment that Russell had undermined his authorial talent and his artistic reputation had become overwhelmed by his popular reputation.

As referenced in Chapter One, American investment in the British film industry during the 1960s provided new opportunities for a generation of emerging filmmakers from television to crossover into commercial cinema. Throughout the 1960s, Ken Russell's artistic reputation provided him several opportunities to crossover. Following the critical and commercial failure of *French Dressing* (Ken Russell, 1964) and *Billion Dollar Brain* (Ken Russell, 1967), Russell established an international reputation as a film director with *Women in Love* (Ken Russell, 1969); a critically and commercially successful adaptation of the D.H. Lawrence novel.[481] Despite American retrenchment from the British film industry, the commercial success of *Women in Love* meant that Russell was still supported by American studios. *The Devils* was initially commissioned as part of a three-picture deal between independent producer Bob H. Solo and United Artists (UA). Following the negative reception of *Dance of the Seven Veils*, UA decided to distance itself from Russell and *The Devils* was picked-up by Warner Bros.[482] who wished to repeat the success of *Women in Love*.[483]

Pre-release press sensationalism was central to the construction of controversy around *The Devils*.[484] From November 1970, the *Evening News* and *Daily Mirror* framed *The Devils* – with references to naked nuns, orgies, and pornography – around the topical cultural discourse of permissiveness and the need for film censorship in regard to increasing graphic material. This was prompted by the liberalisation of the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) under Secretary John Trevelyan during the 1960s and the introduction of the X-certificate in 1970; Trevelyan was replaced as Secretary of the BBFC by Stephen Murphy in 1971. This sensationalism was founded on a production scandal: reports of children being present and

[481] D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love* (Martin Seeker, 1921).
[482] Warner's interest in *The Devils* can be assigned to the studio's acquisition by Kinney National Services in 1969 who, under the management of Ted Ashley, made an initial investment in films orientated toward college audiences. This included European productions such as *Death in Venice* (Luchino Visconti, 1971), *A Clockwork Orange* (Stanley Kubrick, 1971) and *The Devils*.
[483] Anon., 'Pictures: Bob Solo's 3 for UA', *Variety* (20 August 1969); Addison Verrili, 'New Warner Displays Line of Goodies, Two Years of Kinney-Ashley Sweatout', *Variety* (30 June 1971).
[484] Petley, 'Witch-Hunt', 2015.

several extras being assaulted, which resulted in Equity complains, during the filming of an exorcism on a closed set at Pinewood Studios.[485]

Aware of this building controversy, Warner Bros. were particularly concerned about the conservative reaction towards the film; especially in the United States.[486] In an attempt to counter press sensationalism, Warner Bros. marketed *The Devils* as a serious literary adaptation and historical drama for mature audiences made by a prestigious film director.[487] A notable example is the disclaimer featured on *The Devil's* poster and in print ads:

> *The Devils* is not a film for everyone … It is a true story carefully documented, historically accurate – a serious work by a distinguished film maker. As such it is likely to be hailed as a masterpiece by many. But because it is explicit and highly graphic in depicting the bizarre events that occurred in France in 1634, some will find it visually shocking and deeply disturbing. We feel a responsibility to alert you to this. It is our hope that only the audience that will appreciate *The Devils* will come to see it.[488]

Furthermore, Warner Bros distributed a set of screening notes to critics which outlined the historical, political and religious contexts of the film:[489] especially regarding the history of the Catholic Church in France, the Huguenot rebellions and the Loudun possessions. Subsequently, both the press sensationalism and corporate agenda-setting factored into the critical reception of *The Devils*.

### 3.2.1. *The Devils:* the critical reception of *The Devils*

*The Devils* received a predominately negative critical reception on its London West End release at the Warner-Rendezvous in Leicester Square on the 22nd of July 1971. The critical reception of *The Devils* reinforced the established controversy around the film. However, critical hostility

[485] Stanley Bonnett, 'Secret of the Sealed Studio', *Daily Mirror* (4 November 1970_, BFI Press Clippings; Anon., 'Nude Film Girls in Studio Row', *News of the World* (29 November 1970), BFI Press Clippings; Kenelm Jenour, 'Union Move to Protect Nude Film Girls', *Daily Mirror* (30 November 1970), BFI Press Clippings.
[486] Anon. 'Pictures: WB Production Brass in Europe On Checker-Upper', *Variety* (21 July 1971).
[487] Geoff Foreman, 'Warner Bros. Press Release for *The Devils*', Press Release (1970), BFI Press Clippings.
[488] Warner Bros., *The Devils* Pressbook (1971), BFI Press Clippings.
[489] Paul B. Ross, 'Warner. Bros. Screening Notes for The Devils' (Warner Bros., 1971), BFI Press Clippings.

derived as much from the naturalised critical assumptions of traditional film criticism as the filmic representation of permissiveness. Harper and Smith identified that despite the expansion of film criticism in the 1960s, mainstream film criticism was still dominated by the coherent taste, mode of address and assumptions of traditional film criticism into the 1970s.[490] As stated, traditional film criticism adopted a coherent taste culture and moral-cultural standards from literary criticism. These were adapted into critical assumptions such as: the appropriate approach, style and tone for the narrative and subject-matter, and a value in serious subject-matter and themes, underlined by principles such as coherence, verisimilitude and restraint. Somewhat resistant to *auteurism*, traditional criticism valued the single-author, whether screenwriter or film director, who was held responsible for the film. Furthermore, British cinema was conceptualised as a cinema of teamwork with the single-author being valued for craftmanship and artistic restraint.[491]

Regarding film criticism, it is important to note that the critical reception of Ken Russell's previous two feature-films, *Women in Love* and *The Music Lovers*, informed the critical reception of *The Devils*.[492] Released prior to the transmission of *Dance of the Seven Veils*, the critical reception of *Women in Love* reinforced Russell's artistic reputation and was primarily concerned with adaptation and the appropriateness of Russell's authorial approach and style in relation to D. H. Lawrence.[493] Regarding critical consensus, Russell was praised for finding a visual equivalent to Lawrence's 'purple prose' but divided critics on its self-consciousness and inclusion of caricature.[494] In the *Sunday Telegraph*, film critic Margaret Hinxman argued Russell approached Lawrence with "due respect but not undue reverence".[495] Correspondingly, Penelope Houston, the editor of *Sight & Sound*, described Russell's adaptation of Lawrence in *The Spectator* as: "Isadoraian excursions into Lawrentian themes".[496] Regarding Russell's precarious authorial talent, Houston argued that: "Russell's special, hazardous gift: a kind of over-saturation, and an absolute genius for the purplier aspects of his subjects, which by the

[490] Harper and Smith, *British Film Culture in the 1970s*. 218.
[491] John Russell Taylor, *Masterworks of British Cinema* (London: Lorimer Press, 1974), 7.
[492] During this period, staggered film distribution strategies resulted in the extended theatrical, and thus cultural circulation, of films. In the United Kingdom, this primarily consisted of a limited London 'West End' release followed by a national, or general, release with local exhibition windows.
[493] *Women in Love was* released in London prior to the transmission of *Dance of the Seven Veils*, on the 13th November 1969. The general release of *Women in Love* followed the transmission of *Dance of the Seven Veils*.
[494] The reception of *Women in Love* is explored in more detail in Chapter Three alongside Russell's adaptation of D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow*, a prequel to *Women in Love*.
[495] Margaret Hinxman, 'Fims: Look according to Lawrence: *Women in Love*', *Sunday Telegraph* (16 November 1969), BFI press clippings.
[496] Penelope Houston, 'Film: Tremendous din: *Women in Love*', *The Spectator* (26 November 1969), BFI press clippings.

way of pastiche, decoration, allusion, musical reference, turns everything into a parade of sacred monsters."[497] Additionally, the combined artistic reputations of Lawrence and Russell dispelled potential controversy surrounding a wrestling scene between Gerald Crich (Oliver Reed) and Rupert Birkin (Alan Bates) that featured full-frontal male nudity.[498]

The critical reception of *The Music Lovers*, a biopic of the Russian composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, contrasted with that of *Women in Love*.[499] The negative critical reception of *The Music Lovers* largely concerned the film's biographical approach. Primarily, *The Music Lovers* was considered predictable following *Dance of the Seven Veils*. A central criticism being that the film distorted its biographical subject-matter into self-parodic melodrama. For example, George Melly in *The Observer* argued that while Russell was an artist "whose own charisma is central to their work" but as in *The Music Lovers*, "he falls into bathos, although even here he is cunning enough to leave it open as to whether or not this is deliberate."[500] Furthermore, John Russell Taylor in *The Times* argued that Russell distorted his biographical subject in his attempt to "out-melodramatise Tchaikovsky" in an "orgy of *auteur*-cinema".[501] Furthermore, Taylor concluded that *The Music Lovers* confirmed Russell's wayward authorial talent: "there is no doubt that his unique gifts are matched by a unique talent for misapplying them."[502]

Regarding traditional film criticism and the critical reception of *The Devils*, the film's negative critical reception was considered to further confirm the critical expectations associated with Ken Russell's popular reputation. Therefore, the critical reception of *The Devils* shared thematic concerns with the television criticism of *Dance of the Seven Veils*. Primarily, these thematic concerns include: critical and authorial responsibility; the relationship between artistic-moral responsibility and the appropriate authorial taste, style and intention for serious historical subject-matter and theme; and the intention to shock through permissive representation. Regarding Russell's authorial reputation, authorial self-indulgence through excess and the intention to shock, summarised as 'going too far', was considered to undermine

[497] Houston, 'Tremendous din', *The Spectator* (26 November 1969).
[498] Linda Ruth Williams, 'Bad Sex and Obscene Undertakings: Ken Russell's Women in Love', *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance* 6, no. 3 (2013): 341–54.
[499] *The Music Lovers* (released 25 February 1971) was released a year after *Dance of the Seven Veils* (February 1970).
[500] George Melly, 'Films: Piling on the Agony: *The Music Lovers*', *The Observer* (28 February 1971), BFI press clippings.
[501] John Russell Taylor, 'Films: Russell's pathetic fallacy: *The Music Lovers*', *The Times* (24 February 1971), BFI press clippings.
[502] Taylor, 'Russell's pathetic fallacy', BFI press clippings.

his artistic reputation, particularly his authorial talent, and to confirm his popular reputation for waywardness.

Representative of these thematic concerns in the critical reception of *The Devils*, Cecil Wilson in the *Daily Mail* found the film to be "obsessed with nightmare spectacle at the expense of people" and Clive Hirschhorn in the *Sunday Express* argued that if it was Russell's intention to "make a film that seriously explored the mental and physical degradation of the time, and studied the evil effects of religious and sexual hysteria, he has failed lamentably and tastelessly."[503] And regarding authorial reputation, Gavin Miller concluded in *The Listener*: "for someone with the talent of Ken Russell [*The Devils*] represents a sad and continuing decline."[504]

Throughout the critical reception of *The Devils*, Ken Russell's authorship and his established critical reputation is foregrounded. As authorial responsibility is a central thematic concern, Russell as writer-director, or more precisely adaptor, is considered to be solely responsible for the film's failure. Primarily, *The Devils* was considered to fail as an adaptation of both John Whiting and Aldous Huxley, and to also fail as a historical drama: neither meeting nor conforming to the critical standards of literary adaptation nor the critical conventions of historical drama. From a humanist perspective, criticism of *The Devils* centred on the appropriateness of Russell's authorial approach and the resulting tone for a literary adaptation and historical drama with a serious subject-matter and themes.

Primarily, Ken Russell's approach and style was considered too self-indulgent, excessive and unserious for a film adaptation of John Whiting's play and for realistic historical reconstruction. Furthermore, *The Devils* was compared to what film critics considered serious literary adaptations. Primarily, the Polish film *Mother Joan of the Angels* (Jerzy Kawalerowicz, 1961), an adaptation of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz study of the Loudon Possessions, and Peter Brook's contemporaneously released film adaptation of William Shakespeare's *King Lear* (Peter Brook, 1971).[505] Furthermore, David Robinson in the *Financial Times* concluded that "the plain vulgarity and commonness of *The Devils*" revealed Russell to be "the most literal-

[503] Cecil Wilson, 'Films: This, without Doubt, Is a *Devil* of a Film', *Daily Mail* (22 July 1979), BFI press clippings; Clive Hirschhorn, 'Films: *The Devils*', *Sunday Express* (25 July 1971), BFI Press Clippings.
[504] Gavin Millar, 'Films: *King Lear*: *The Devils'*, *The Listener* (29 July 1971), BFI Press Clippings.
[505] Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, *Nowa Miłość i Inne Opowiadania* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1946).

minded of directors" because the "infantile compulsion to shock and repel […] are achieved at the expense of the story, the players, finally the whole film" which resulted in "nothing more substantial than a school's radio history play".[506]

In *The Sunday Telegraph*, Margaret Hinxman argued that *The Devils* was an "unserious film about a serious concern".[507] Hinxman described Ken Russell as a "destructive filmmaker" because that while his "flamboyance and that of the original happened to coincide" with *Women in Love*, *The Devils* was "not an ideal choice of subject for him" because instead of "Whiting's terrible white heat of forbidden passion, Russell stokes a bonfire of unholy sensations".[508] Similarly, the film critic Eric Shorter argued in *The Daily Telegraph* that *The Devils* was a "hysterical account of an unusually hysterical situation" that was unsuitable for Russell because while in "Whiting's play some semblance of dignity was achieved […]. With Mr Russell nothing seems to matter seriously except the next sensation".[509] In *The Observer*, George Melly argued that "if the political message of the film was central, the use of the nuns' suppressed eroticism and their escalating fantasies would have been perfectly defensible."[510] Furthermore, Felix Baxter in the *Evening News* argued that "to escape charges of sensationalism it needs to be […] deliberately restrained".[511] Therefore, Baxter recommended that an adaptation of Whiting's play: "calls not for extravagance, but careful psychological examination of religious hysteria and sexual repression. It needs human sympathy: not apparently prurient delight in human degradation."[512]

Regarding *The Devils* as a historical drama, the relationship between artistic-moral responsibility and authorial self-indulgence was central to the critical discourse around the film. Primarily, Ken Russell's authorial self-indulgence was held responsible for the failure of the film. Specifically, the humanist criticism that stylistic excess, fantasy and the intention to shock undermined narrative diegesis, dramatic and historical verisimilitude and psychological characterisation. For example, Felix Baxter in the *Evening News* found *The Devils* to be "repulsive […] in terms of artistic excess" and Christopher Hudson in *The Spectator* argued

[506] David Robinson, 'Films: *The Devils*', *Financial Times* (23 July 1971), BFI press clippings.
[507] Margaret Hinxman, 'Films: *The Devils* of a mess', *The Sunday Telegraph* (25 July 1971), BFI press clippings.
[508] Hinxman, '*The Devils* of a Mess', BFI press clippings.
[509] Eric Shorter, 'Films: Bewitched by Violence: *The Devils*', *The Daily Telegraph* (23 July 1971), BFI press clippings.
[510] George Melly, ''Films: Camping It up in the Convent: *The Devils*', *The Observer* (25 July 1971), BFI press clippings.
[511] Felix Baxter, 'Films: To the *Devils* with this repulsive film', *Evening News* (21 July 1971), BFI Press Clippings.
[512] Baxter, 'To the *Devils*', BFI Press Clippings.

that "style completely swamps the content" which resulted in "all expressionism and nothing expressed."[513] Regarding excess, the film critic Dilys Powell in *The Sunday Times*, proposed: "it is a question of how much is too much."[514] Powell argued that Russell had "indulged his taste for fantasy" and that while "many of the more repulsive details have documentary warrant […] accuracy, ought to concern itself with human feelings too."[515] Furthermore, "what one actually feels is a general nausea and disgust, not with the facts of inhumanity […] but with a style of treatment which subordinates the victims to a lovingly detailed examination of their tortures."[516] In *The Times*, Penelope Houston argued that Russell had in "tying kites of gloating fantasy to the already sufficiently extraordinary story", denied the "film conflict or any lucidity of argument".[517] Furthermore, Houston argued that Russell had "allowed no dignity of belief" in representing the nuns as "simply St Trinian's run amok", and in "denying his characters so much, Russell denies himself nothing."[518] And in *The Daily Telegraph*, Eric Shorter described *The Devils* as a "grotesque exaggeration of human nature".[519]

As examined above, the appropriateness of Ken Russell's authorial approach for serious literary adaptation and historical drama was a central thematic concern in the critical reception of *The Devils*. Specifically, in relation to the authorial intention behind his burlesque approach to the subject-matter, which incorporated historical anachronism and fantasy, combined with his stated intention to shock. Both were considered to undermine historical and dramatic verisimilitude and trivialise the serious subject-matter and theme of the film.[520] Furthermore, critics were also concerned with authorial taste and tonal ambiguity in regard to whether Russell was intentionally sending-up the source material and subject-matter.[521] For example, Cecil Wilson stated in *The Daily Mail* that you were "never quite sure whether you ought to be laughing or not".[522]

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[513] Baxter, 'To the *Devils*', BFI press clippings; Christopher Hudson, 'Films: Wheels of Fire: *The Devils*', *The Spectator* (24 July 1971), 145.
[514] Dilys Powell, 'Films: Monsters of the Deep: *The Devils*', *The Sunday Times* (25 July 1971), BFI press clippings.
[515] Powell, 'Monsters of the Deep' BFI press clipping.
[516] Powell, 'Monsters of the Deep'.
[517] Penelope Houston, 'Films: Nuns' Tale: *The Devils*', *The Times* (23 July 1971), BFI press clippings.
[518] Houston, 'Nuns' Tale', BFI Press clippings.
[519] Eric Shorter, 'Bewitched by Violence', BFI press clippings; Hinxman, '*The Devils* of a Mess', BFI Press Clippings..
[520] A central criticism throughout the criticism of *The Devils* was the historically anachronistic representation of Louis XIII (Graham Armitage). Particularly, a scene where Louis XIII shoots Protestants dressed as crows and retorts "Bye, Bye Blackbird".
[521] Regarding the intention behind burlesque, Russell later stated in the horror magazine *Shivers* that "what people didn't understand […] is that *The Devils* was done with a great sense of irony. Like a send-up. The two doctors were comic characters; they did evil things" (Pitt, 1998: 32).
[522] Wilson, 'This, without doubt, is a devil of a film', BFI press clippings.

In *The Daily Telegraph*, Eric Shorter argued that "it is unfortunately hard to believe in anyone else in this curiously stagey hotbed of old provincial France with its H. G. Wells-ish décor […] and fugitive actors from Joan Littlewood's company at Stratford East."[523] And while Shorter argued that "the style of the debauchery […] looks more suited to revue than melodrama", Margaet Hinxman in *The Sunday Telegraph* argued that: "time and again one's respect for the film is wrecked by dreadful music hall asides […] calculated bits of Whitehall farce […] and some lunatic casting in the lower echelons."[524] Furthermore, Hinxman argued: "Presumably all this is meant to shake us up, make our responses more alert, even if the response is rage. But if the rage is directed at Russell instead of at the religious hypocrisy and political expediency […] then surely that defeats the object of the exercise!"[525] Similarly, George Melly in *The Observer* argued that: "if this is aimed at Brechtian alienation it fails. It comes across as one long, paranoid giggle, and there is also the flaw that, however hideous the subject matter, the effect is curiously chic."[526] Bluntly, Clive Hirschhorn in the *Sunday Express* understood that "Russell's tongue is very much in his cheek" but the "wildly anachronistic screenplay is little more than a parody or 'send-up', of the whole grisly period: a sort of *Carry On Witchcraft*."[527] In conclusion, Penelope Houston in *The Times* argued that Russell could "no doubt defend himself against the charge of making a totally unrealistic film […] by some claim for art as pantomime, or the liberating advantages of excess" but "anyone who can stage a setting as horrifying as a Callot engraving and then animate it like a madcap sketch from some long-defunct revue, misfires on both barrels."[528]

In consideration of the critical reception above, a more accurate way to describe the British critical reception of *The Devils* is uniform critical hostility rather than outright critical condemnation. Regarding *The Devils* critical reception and subsequent reputation in British film culture, the retrospective impression that *The Devils* received outright critical condemnation, misremembered on the anti-permissive charge of blasphemy, is largely based on the critical authority ascribed to Tom Milne's review of the film for *Monthly Film Bulletin*

[523] Shorter, 'Bewitched by Violence', BFI press clippings.
[524] Shorter, 'Bewitched by Violence', BFI press clippings; Hinxman, '*The Devils* of a mess', BFI Press clippings.
[525] Hinxman, 'The Devils of a Mess', *The Sunday Telegraph*.
[526] Melly, 'Camping it up in the convent', BFI press clippings.
[527] Wilson, 'This, without doubt, is a devil of a film', BFI press clippings; Clive Hirschhorn, '*The Devils'*, BFI Press Clippings.
[528] Houston, 'Nuns' Tale', BFI press clippings.

and the critical hostility of Alexander Walker's review of the film for the *Evening Standard*.[529] For reference, *Monthly Film Bulletin* (1934-1991) was a British Film Institute (BFI) publication and was therefore considered, alongside the more highbrow *Sight & Sound* (1932-), to represent cultural-critical authority and legitimate taste in British film culture. And during the 1970s, both publications shared a taste for foreign-language cinema, British cinema within the arthouse category and held particular opprobrium for Ken Russell.[530] In *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Tom Milne described *The Devils* as: "a tabloid newspaper approach to the sex, violence, and corruption, showing [Urbain] Grandier's [Oliver Reed] torture and the nun's aberrations in full gory detail but forgetting to explain what they are all about."[531] Here, the "comic-strip overstatement" looked "uncannily like a companion piece to *Hellzapoppin'* [Henry C. Potter, 1941]" – an American musical comedy noted for its madcap absurdity – that belaboured "the barbarism of the period to the point of bathos".[532]

The most influential review of *The Devils* in the British mainstream press was written by the film critic Alexander Walker for the *Evening Standard*. Primarily, this is due to Walker's critical hostility toward the film and the continued circulation of selected quotes from his review. In the *Evening Standard*, Walker reviewed *The Devils* from a humanist perspective informed by his liberal-conservatism and accordingly, considered *The Devils* to be a misanthropic film. Principally, Walker argued that Russell's approach to the subject-matter undermined verisimilitude and seriousness. As a literary adaptation and a historical drama, Walker argued that *The Devils* was: "more directly influenced by Dachau and De Sade than by either Aldous Huxley's book or John Whiting's play on which Russell has based his script". [533] Furthermore, Walker criticised Russell's burlesque approach and argued that: "the exercise of statecraft by Louis XIII [Graham Armitage] is reduced to camp charades in drag".[534] Similarly, George Melly in *The Observer* described Russell's interpretation of Louis XIII as "like a drag queen in an East End pub".[535]

[529] Tom Milne, '*The Devils*', *Monthly Film Bulletin* (38: 444) (1971), 161–62; Alexander Walker, 'Films: Where Does It Hurt? *The Devils*', *Evening Standard* (22 July 1971), BFI press clippings.
[530] Harper and Smith, *British Film Culture in the 1970s* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012)., 223-224
[531] Milne, '*The Devils*', 162.
[532] Milne, '*The Devils*'.
[533] Walker, 'Where Does It Hurt?', BFI press clippings.
[534] Walker, 'Where Does It Hurt?'.
[535] Melly, 'Camping it up in the convent', BFI press clippings.

Acerbic in his criticism, a central theme in Walker's review of *The Devils* is his moral concern for the physicality of the film. For example, Walker compared *The Devils* to *Mother Joan of the Angels* and argued that while Jerzy Kawalerowicz's study of religious hysteria was "austerely analytical, Russell's is grotesquely anatomical."[536] Here, Walker objects to the graphic representation of torture in the film, describing it as a "garish glossary of sado-masochism", and argues that: "nothing the screen shows us is so monstrously indecent as the simple-mindedness of a writer-director who believes that the best way of approaching the problems of conscience and the ills of the soul is through the repeated physical agonies of the flesh."[537] And holding Russell responsible, Walker concluded that: "almost every serious, question raised by the historical situation is thrown away by Russell in order to flaunt a taste for visual sensation that makes scene after scene look like the masturbatory fantasies of a Roman Catholic boyhood."[538] Furthermore, the cultural impact of Alexander Walker's review of *The Devils* rests on the transformation of critical hostility into personal animosity on the television programme *24 Hours*. The reputational impact of this televised confrontation between Alexander Walker and Ken Russell will be discussed in the following section.

An overlooked aspect in the critical reception of *The Devils*, is both the critical nuance in generally negative reviews of the film in the mainstream press, which includes back-handed compliments, and the alternative critical response in the trade press. In regard to critical nuance, this centred critical expectations around his artistic and his popular reputations in relation to authorial talent and waywardness. In relation to craftsmanship, Russell was simultaneously praised for his technical control and criticised for its effect. For example, George Melly in *The Observer* stated that Russell's "technical control is totally professional" and Cecil Wilson in *The Daily Mail* described *The Devils* as "a masterly piece of screen craft and a horrible one".[539] In relation to his artistic reputation, Russell was considered by critics to have become a disappointment because of the predictable misuse of his authorial talent; characterised by authorial self-indulgence. Here, Melly followed the above statement with the assessment that: "what is so sad is that here he had a subject of contemporary relevance and offers us no more than his own unrelated obsessions."[540] In *The Sunday Telegraph*, Margaret Hinxman argued

[536] Walker, 'Where Does it Hurt?', BFI press clippings.
[537] Walker.
[538] Walker.
[539] Melly, 'Camping it up in the Convent', BFI press clippings; Wilson, 'This, without doubt, is a devil of a film', BFI press clippings..
[540] Melly, 'Camping t up in the convent'.

that while "Russell constructs a marvellous-looking film, bizarre, grandiose, provocative", she found it "such a pity is that Russell should apparently so distrust his own skill as a mesmerising story-teller" but "there is no denying, however, that Russell is never dull."[541]

In the mainstream press, Derek Malcolm of *The Guardian* was more accommodating toward Ken Russell. In his nuanced assessment of *The Devils*, Malcolm was more concerned with audience expectations and approaching the film on its own merits. Here, Malcolm identified that: "if you expect the studious reportage of Huxley's *The Devils of Loudon* or the steely irony of Whiting's play, you will be much confused. It is not that kind of thing at all."[542] Rather, "Russell has been true to himself as never before" and as "a strutting pantomime of a movie that sets you up for a kick in the teeth, then pinches you in the backside instead" that "by normal standards this is a very bad film indeed" and "instead you just have to wallow and hope as you progress beyond the valley of the nuns."[543] Here, the conclusion of his review referring to the controversial American satirical exploitation melodrama: *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* (Russ Meyer, 1970).

Significantly, *The Devils* received an alternative reception in the trade press. In contrast to the mainstream press, *The Devils* was valued as a genre film, particularly in regard to horror, and for its physicality. In *Kinematograph Weekly*, Graham Clarke described *The Devils* as: "a horror film in the truest sense of the word: horrific in the inhumanity of its medieval politico-religious bigotry; and physically horrific".[544] Furthermore, Marjorie Bilbow in *Today's Cinema* did not agree with the critical consensus that Ken Russell had "gone far beyond the boundaries of good taste".[545] Instead, she argued that the film was not blasphemous and its graphic representation was appropriate because: "in the historical context of the events in Loudun, good taste would have been the nosegay which once enabled the rich to ignore the stench of poverty and disease."[546] Both Clarke and Bilbow considered Russell a special attraction for audiences and believed the X-certificate and press speculation would attract strong business from a younger adult audience.

[541] Hinxman, *'The Devils* of a Mess'.
[542] Derek Malcolm, 'Films: The Russell of Sex: *The Devils*', *The Guardian* (22 July 1971), BFI press clippings.
[543] Malcolm, 'The Russell of Sex', BFI press clippings.
[544] Graham Clarke, 'Reviews: *The Devils*', *Kine Weekly* (24 July 1971).
[545] Marjorie Bilbow, 'Reviews: *The Devils*', *Today's Cinema* (23 July 1971).
[546] Bilbow, '*The Devils*'.

*The Devils* continued to cause controversy into the following year due to its general release. Primarily, this concerned negative reports in both the trade and mainstream press of the film being banned. Internationally, this began with reports of the Catholic Church's reaction to *The Devils* being awarded 'Best Foreign Film' at the 32nd Venice International Film Festival (25 August – 6 September 1971).[547] Here, Catholic institutions such as the Centro Cinematografico Cattolico (CCC) and associated publications, such as the *L'Osservatore Romano* (1861- ), accused the film of historical distortion and blasphemy.[548] Subsequently, little press attention was paid to this ban being overturned. Nationally, negative press reception focused on the objection to *The Devils* by moral campaign groups, such as the NVLA and the Nationwide Festival of Light, and reports about the overruling the film's BBFC classification by local authorities. This prevented *The Devils* from gaining an exhibition licence and being screened in some local areas. Here, the trade press was particularly concerned over the attempt to overturn the Greater London Council's (GLC) decision to retain the BBFC certification of *The Devils* and allow the exhibition of the film. Consequently, Warner Bros. incorporated "Best Foreign Film: Venice Film Festival 1971" as banner on the posters for the general release of *The Devils* to counter the continued negative press reception. As a result of the controversy, *The Devils* was a commercial success. And like *Dance of the Seven Veils*, the sustained controversy around *The Devils* influenced its future cult reputation.

### 3.3. The Development of Ken Russell's Public Persona: becoming the *enfant terrible* in print and on television, and the institutional response

As outlined in Chapter One, Ken Russell's artistic reputation as a television director enabled him to cross-over into the commercial cinema throughout the 1960s. Initially, Russell's artistic reputation informed the development of his public persona which Russell used to distinguish himself from other television directors who were crossing-over into commercial cinema. Parallel to the development of this artistic reputation, Russell also developed a contrasting popular reputation associated with cultural permissiveness, critical divisiveness and

[547] *The Devils* premiered and won the Best Foreign Film at the Venice Film Festival, 1971. Similarly, *Savage Messiah* premiered at the Venice Film Festival, 1972 and *Mahler* was chosen as the British entry for the Cannes Film Festival, 1974 and won the Technical Prize. *Tommy* was screened out-of-competition at the Cannes Film Festival, 1975.
[548] Anon., 'The Vatican Makes a New Attack on *The Devils*', *The Times* (2 September 1971), BFI press clippings.

waywardness as 'The Wild Man of the BBC'.[549] As examined in this Chapter, Russell became firmly associated with self-indulgent excess, negative critical reception and, in relation to permissiveness, controversy with *Dance of the Seven Veils* and *The Devils*. Furthermore, Russell developed a corresponding flamboyant and contrarian public persona which, whether intentionally or tongue-in-cheek, caused controversy in itself and reinforced his established popular reputation.

The visibility of Ken Russell's public persona in the media during this period is significant because it coincides with the assimilation of *auteurism* into industrial models, the foregrounding of the 'director-as-author' in popular culture and the film director becoming an increasingly fashionable figure; a period which Joseph Gelmis named as the 'film director as superstar'.[550] In relation to performance modes and acting styles, Sue Harper and Justin Smith further noted that there was a shift in self-presentation and subjectivity during the 1970s toward the mannered and knowingly, or ironic disavowal.[551] Russell's performance of his public persona is characterised by said ironic disavowal because he contradictorily 'played up' to both his artistic and popular reputations and performed the 'film director' through a combination of contrarian self-presentation and romantic self-discourse. Particularly, in regard to the contrast between Russell self-romanticising himself as a misunderstood outsider and the contrarian statements he made. For example, repeatedly stating that it was his intention to shock. Furthermore, Russell's ironic disavowal is underscored by ambiguity around whether he intentionally 'sends up' his popular reputation and the 'film-director-as-star' of the period. Arguably, it is this ironic disavowal that undermines a serious consideration of Russell and his work.

An outcome of the controversy that surrounded *Dance of the Seven Veils* was increased media interest in Ken Russell himself. To distinguish himself from other television directors, Russell adopted a public persona that contradictorily 'played up' to both his artistic reputation as the 'television-director-as-artist' and popular reputation as the 'Wild Man of the BBC' through a combination of contrarian self-presentation and romantic self-discourse. In separate interviews in the *Daily Express* and *The Times*, Russell stated that it was his intention with *Dance of the*

[549] This was acknowledged in the marketing of *Women in Love* (Ken Russell, 1969) with the United Artists pressbook for *Women in Love* describing Russell as the "wild man of the BBC'.
[550] Joseph Gelmis, *The Film Director as Superstar* (New York: Secker & Warburg, 1971).
[551] Harper and Smith, *British Film Culture in the* 1970s, 188-189.

*Seven Veils* to shock 'half-asleep' audiences into their moral responsibilities. In the *Daily Express*, Russell stated to Tim Heald that: "the television audience are all asleep in their armchairs. It is a good thing to shake them up: even if it's only as far as the phone" and "it's like Nazi Germany. People said, 'Oh, we know the Jews are being tortured but we don't want to see pictures of it.' But this is how these things start."[552] Correspondingly, Russell stated to Peter Waymark in *The Times* that it was his intention "to shock complacent critics and viewers who sit in front of their sets for hours on end watching cocoa advertisements […] into a realisation of their responsibilities."[553] Furthermore, Russell defended his 'comic-strip style' in *The Times* through romantic self-discourse undermined by contrarianism. Here, Russell argued that the style of his biographies are shaped by their subject and that he interpretated Strauss as "a self-advertising, vulgar, commercial man" whose inflated ego was a "typically German trait".[554] Contrarian statements such as these fuelled the controversy around *Dance of the Seven Veils* and reinforced Russell's association with controversy.

A significant development as Russell crossed-over from television to commercial cinema was that specialist critical support shifted from *Amateur Movie Maker* (1957-1967) and *Movie Maker* (1967-1985) to the middlebrow film journal: *Films and Filming* (1954-1990).[555] Sue Harper and Justin Smith defined *Films and Filming*, edited by Robin Bean from 1968 to 1980, as an important mainstream journal that "marked out a middle ground between high-brow aficionados and popular fandom".[556] Furthermore, Harper and Smith identified *Films and Filming* as being the "only serious journal to give positive attention to popular British cinema" and can be noted for the "rare in the praise it gave to Ken Russell".[557] In line with cinephile film criticism, *Films and Filming* adopted an *auteurist* perspective and in relation to Russell: distinguished him from other British film directors because of his combined artistic and popular reputations. Therefore, Russell was permitted to promote his public persona and perform the 'film director' in *Films and Filming* and self-romanticise himself as a misunderstood artist in a number of feature articles and interviews.

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[552] Tim Heald, 'The Time Heald Interview: Ken Russell: people need shaking up"', *Daily Express* (February 1971), BFI press clippings.
[553] Peter Waymark, 'Film director wanted to shock', *The Times*, (17 February 1970), BFI press clippings.
[554] Waymark, 'Film director wanted to shock', BFI press clippings.
[555] Particularly, in the criticism of Australian journalist Gordon Gow. For example, Gow reviewed *The Devils* in September 1971 issue and considered the anachronism and historic performances appropriate for the subject-matters "climate of frenzy" and praised the film's visual design, shock value and theme of transformation (1971: 49).
[556] Harper and Smith, 219.
[557] Harper and Smith, 219.

Following the transmission of *Dance of the Seven Veils*, *Films and Filming* published the first of a number of in-depth feature articles and interviews conducted with Ken Russell and select collaborators. For example, Melvyn Bragg, the writer of *The Debussy Film: Impressions of the French Composer* (BBC One, 18 May 1965) and *The Music Lovers* and later editor of *The South Bank Show* (London Weekend Television, 1978-2010), and Russell's wife from 1956 to 1978, the costume designer Shirley Russell (née Kingdon).[558] In Gordon Gow's article 'Shock Treatment', Russell was romanticised as a serious filmmaker and in accord with critical support: Russell departed from the contrarian self-presentation he performed in the mainstream press.[559] Therefore, Russell was able to explain his authorial approach and intentions in some detail. Principally, that he both critically and instinctively selected from historical, biographical and cultural sources to reach a dramatic truth and approached historical and biographical reconstruction in unexpected terms to make the audience aware of conventions: "to turn everything upside down will make everyone, look at the situation from a different point of view and gain a fresh perspective" and "deliberately [..] shock people into awareness".[560]

Russell achieved a level of public notoriety because of the controversy that surrounded *Dance of the Seven Veils*. Therefore, media interest in Ken Russell intensified in accord with the controversy around *The Devils*. To tie-in with the release of *The Devils*, Russell was featured as the cover story of *The Sunday Telegraph's* colour supplement, *The Daily Telegraph Magazine*, and was profiled as a fashionable figure in Lee Langley's accompanying feature article: 'The Right to be Outrageous'.[561] Langley had previously profiled Russell in *The Guardian* to tie-in with the release of *Billion Dollar Brain* (Ken Russell, 1967).[562] Photographed by David Hurn, Russell featured on the front cover of *The Daily Telegraph Magazine*: directing on the set of *The Devils* dressed flamboyantly in floral patterned shirt, Donald Duck embroidered student cap and sunglasses. In the article, Langley examines Russell's flamboyant public persona and contrarian self-presentation as a construction: a self-reflexive performance of the 'film director'. Langley describes Russell as "erratic, larger than

[558] Throughout the 1970s, stills from Russell's films regularly featured on the front cover of *Films and Filming* alongside picture previews of his upcoming releases. At the beginning of the 1970s, Russell was the subject of several feature articles in *Films and Filming* (Gow, 1970: Buckley, 1972) and also allowed Russell himself to defend *auteurism* as a concept (Russell, 1972).
[559] Gordon Gow, 'Shock Treatment', *Films and Filming* (16: 10) (1970), 8–12.
[560] Gow, 'Shock Treatment', 8–9.
[561] Lee Langley, 'The Right to Be Outrageous', *The Daily Telegraph Magazine* (9 July 1971), BFI press clippings.
[562] Lee Langley, 'The Eisenstein File', *The Guardian* (26 October 1967), BFI press clippings.

life, the most personal and technically accomplished British director of his generation" and foregrounds his presentation as a film director:

> At times when movie directors seem to be losing their traditionally flamboyant image, Ken Russell strikes a bravura note reminiscent of Hollywood in its high days. Caftans. Boots, canes, outsize tinted glasses, ornamental crucifixes, fancy caps, cloaks, he carries them all off with a gleeful abandon. His very excess upsets people.[563]

As indicated above, Langley identifies Ken Russell's public persona as being divisive and further proposes that it has an impact on his critical reception. Here, "occasionally, one suspects, the films suffer critical mauling not only on their own behalf but their makers".[564] Significantly, this article is reprinted in the United States in *Show* and is retitled: 'Ken Russell: A Director Who Demands the Right to be Outrageous'.[565] Moreover, articles such Langley's and 'Ken Russell: Director in a Caftan' from *Time* disseminate a flamboyant image of Russell in the United States and contribute to his international reputation as 'The *Enfant Terrible* of British cinema'.[566]

Ken Russell is significant because of the presentation and performance of his public persona on television. In July 1971, Russell's presence on British television during the opening week of *The Devils* in the West End of London had a significant reputational impact in regard to the confirmation of his popular reputation as 'The Wild Man of the BBC' and the fixing of his public persona as an *enfant terrible*. Principally, this concerned Russell's contrarian self-presentation on the late-night magazine programme, *24 Hours* (BBC One, 22 July 1971), and the BBC's institutional presentation of Russell in the *Omnibus* documentary, *Russell's Progress* (BBC One, 25 July 1971). Russell's appearance on *24 Hours* concerned a discussion, chaired by Ludovic Kennedy, with the *Evening Standard* film critic Alexander Walker which concluded with Russell physically assaulting Walker. It is also important to note here, that references to the confrontation on *24 Hours* has historically been miscredited to have occurred on *Tonight* (BBC One, 1975-1979).

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[563] Langley, 'The Right to Be Outrageous', BFI press clippings.
[564] Langley, 'The Right to Be Outrageous'.
[565] Lee Langley, 'Ken Russell: A Director Who Demands the Right to Be Outrageous', *Show* (October 1971), 34-38.
[566] Anon., 'Director in a Caftan', *Time* (13 September 1971), BFI press clippings.

The confrontation between Ken Russell and Alexander Walker on *24 Hours* primarily referenced Donald Zec's condemnatory review of *The Devils* for the *Daily Mirror*, titled 'Hell's Belles',[567] and can be summarised as follows. Walker argued that the combination of religious subject-matter and the graphic representation of sex and violence in *The Devils* had resulted in its poor reception in the United States. In response, Russell pointed out the hypocrisy of nudity in the British tabloid press, referring to a photograph of a naked child urinating on the page opposite to Zec's review, and countered the Walker's misrepresentation of the torture scenes in *The Devils* that he had published in his review.[568] At the climax, Russell responded to Walker's reference to the American reception of *The Devils* with "go to America and write for the fucking Americans" and then hit Walker on the head with a rolled-up copy of *The Evening Standard*.[569] This confrontational behaviour cohered with Russell's repeated statements in the press that it was his intention to shock and confirmed Russell's popular reputation as 'The Wild Man of the BBC'.

In contrast, Ken Russell was also profiled in the same week in the *Omnibus* 'behind-the-scenes' documentary: *Russell's Progress*. As a former *Omnibus* filmmaker, Russell is significant because he had been previously profiled in the *Late Night Line-up* (BBC Two, 1964-1972) documentary *Russell at Work* (BBC Two, 23 September 1966) and his artistic reputation was disseminated through the television retrospective: 'The Ken Russell Festival' (BBC One, 1968). A marked difference from his reserved self-presentation in the earlier *Russell at Work*, Russell is presented in *Russell's Progress* as a serious but flamboyant filmmaker. Primarily, Russell is presented in the process of directing on the set of *The Devils* and *The Boy Friend* (Ken Russell, 1971) or he is presented being interviewed about his authorial intentions filmed from the backseat of a Rolls Royce.[570] And considering transmission order on the week *The Devils* was released, Russell's contrarian self-presentation on *24 Hours* undermined his later serious institutional presentation in *Russell's Progress*.

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[567] Alongside Alexander Walker's review of *The Devils* in the *Evening Standard*, Donald Zec's review of *The Devils* in the *Daily Mirror* can be considered genuinely condemnatory. In line with sensationalist pre-release press articles published in the *Daily Mirror* about *The Devils*, Zec argued that the film presented "some of the most rancid and sadistic scenes in the whole history of motion pictures" and objected to the "way Russell has the camera gloat over them, as though he were relishing it all" (Zec, 1971: 15).

[568] In the *Evening Standard*, Walker incorrectly recounted the torture scenes as: "[Grandier] is then subjected to a process of disintegration in which his head is shaven, his tongue stretched, his testicles pierced, his lower limbs split by wooden wedges and his body finally flambéed over a quick flame" (Walker, 1971).

[569] No recordings of this episode exists but it is reported in internal BBC documents, press coverage and personal testimonies.

[570] *Russell's Progress* was produced and directed by Geoffrey Haydon, narrated by veteran broadcaster Richard Baker and featured an extended interview with the composer Peter Maxwell Davies. Footage from *Russell's Progress* was re-edited into the Warner Bros. promotional film *Director of the Devils* (1971).

The confrontation between Ken Russell and Alexander Walker on *24 Hours* was a significant event because of its reputational impact. Considering the press, critical and institutional response to both *24 Hours* and *Russell's Progress*, Russell's contrarian self-presentation on *24 Hours* represents the moment his artistic reputation is overwhelmed by his popular reputation. As a result, his public persona reached the limits of television authorship. The confrontation between Russell and Walker on *24 Hours* was extensively reported and commented on in both the trade and mainstream press. Principally, Russell caused widespread complaint over his use of obscene language which was considered to have enflamed controversy further.[571] Furthermore, the trade press suggested that Russell's appearance on *24 Hours* contributed to the opening success of *The Devils* at the Warner-Rendezvous.[572] In a survey of opinion, readers of the *Radio Times* were broadly divided on Russell's appearance on *24 Hours* in relation to his artistic reputation. Here, opinion was divided over whether Russell was an artist passionately defending his work against criticism or he had become too self-important and had wasted his talent on *The Devils*.[573] Regarding *Russell's Progress*, television critics considered the profile to be a mere advertisement for *The Devils* and a waste of an opportunity to examine Russell's development as a filmmaker.[574] A central criticism was that Russell's authorial intentions were presented without analysis.[575] In *The Daily Telegraph*, Sylvia Clayton argued that *Russell's Progress* was "uncritical and uninformative about this gifted, self-indulgent film-maker" and instead "it should have considered and questioned the fantasies he imposed on the music of Tchaikovsky and Richard Strauss. It should not have allowed the arrogance of his imagination to go unchallenged."[576]

Ken Russell's appearance on *24 Hours* undermined the institutional agenda-setting of the BBC. The BBC's Weekly Programme Review Meeting following *24 Hours* and *Russell's Progress* reveals a shift in BBC Management's opinion of Russell. A central theme in the Weekly

[571] Anon., 'BBC Film Talk Ends in Row', *The Daily Telegraph* (July 23 1971), BFI press clippings; Phillip Mellor, 'Film man in TV row over *The Devils'*, *Daily Mirror* (23 July 1971), BFI press clippings; Anon., 'BBC Warning to Director', *The Daily Telegraph* (24 July 1971), 3; Anon., 'Film Man in TV Row over *The Devils*', *The Sun* (25 July 1971), BFI Press Clippings.
[572] E. O. Parker and Euan Lloyd, 'Ken Russell and That Four-Letter Word', *Today's Cinema* (30 July 1971).
[573] Anon., 'Ken Russell and His Critics Have Their Say', *Radio Times* (12 August 1971), BFI Press Clippings.
[574] Sylvia Clayton, 'Television: George Best Faces His Press Cuttings: *Omnibus*, *Russell's Progress* (BBC-1)', *The Daily Telegraph* (26 July 1971), 7; Peter Fiddick, 'Television: Ken Russell on Television: *Omnibus*, *Russell's Progress* (BBC-1)', *The Guardian* (26 July 1971), 8; Philip Purser, 'Television: Greening of Britain: *Omnibus, Russell's Progress* (B.B.C. 1)', *The Sunday Telegraph* (1 August 1971), 12.
[575] Clayton, 'George Best Faces His Press Cuttings'; Fiddick, 'Ken Russell on Television'.
[576] Clayton, 'George Best Faces His Press Cuttings'.

Programme Review Meeting is the limits of television authorship: especially the creative autonomy and presentation of directors with artistic reputations. BBC Management concluded that the confrontation between Ken Russell and Alexander Walker on *24 Hours*, which had led Russell to swear, was predictable but also calculated to "generate heat".[577] Regarding *Russell's Progress*, BBC Management concluded that it had been little more than a promotion for *The Devils* and failed to profile Russell's artistic development.[578] In regard to *The Devils*, Andrew Harris pondered: "how was it that a man of Russell's talents could start down a road and then be given a lot of power and toys to play with and yet produce an end product that signified nothing?"[579] And while BBC Management had supported the decision to produce and transmit *Dance of the Seven Veils*, they had come to the conclusion that with *The Devils*: Russell had betrayed his talent and could neither be controlled by the BBC nor the commercial film industry.[580]

The confrontation between Ken Russell and Alexander Walker on *24 Hours* also fixed a broader reputational narrative in regard to Russell's antagonism toward film critics. Subsequently, the *Evening Standard* published a written request by Russell for Walker not to review his next film, *The Boy Friend* because "Walker's personal animosity towards myself odours his criticism."[581] In response, the *Evening Standard* recalled Walker from his holiday to review *The Boy Friend* and stated that their critics' "duty is to their readers rather than to directors looking for more favourable treatment for their work."[582] Furthermore, Walker's review of *The Devils* shaped the subsequent reputation of the film because it, alongside commentary about the confrontation on *24 Hours*, was reproduced and re-circulated in Walker's personal surveys of British cinema and edited collections of his critical reception; influencing the subsequent understanding of *The Devils* initial reception.[583]

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[577] BBC, 'TV Weekly Programme Review Meetings' (28th July 1971), BBC WAC T62/5/1.
[578] BBC, 'TV Weekly Programme Review Meetings', BBCWAC T62/5/1.
[579] BBC, 'TV Weekly Programme Review Meetings', BBCWAC T62/5/1.
[580] BBC, 'TV Weekly Programme Review Meetings', BBCWAC T62/5/1.
[581] Anon., 'Alexander Walker is one of the leading film critics in the country ...', *Evening Standard* (20 January 1972), BFI press clippings.
[582] Anon., 'Response to Ken Russell', *Evening Standard* (20 January 1972), BFI Press Clippings; Anon., 'Russell Versus Walker', *Evening Standard*, (25 January 1972), BFI Press Clippings.
[583] Walker, *National Heroes: British Cinema in the Seventies and Eighties*; Alexander Walker, *Double Takes: Notes and Afterthoughts on the Movies, 1956-1976* (Elm Tree Books, 1977); Alexander Walker, *It's Only A Movie, Ingrid: Encounters On And Off Screen* (Headline Book Publishing, 1988).

In regard to Russell's popular reputation, an additional development as a consequence of Russell's increased visibility due to sustained controversy was that his public persona, alongside his filmmaking style and biographical approach, began to be satirised and parodied in British popular culture. Here, Russell's flamboyant public persona, contrarian self-presentation and performance of the 'film director' lent itself easily to satire (particularly the tyrannical film director). Furthermore, the permissive imagery of *Dance of the Seven Veils* and *The Devils* was likewise easy to parody (i.e., the inflammatory combination of nuns in a state of undress and Nazis). For example, the magazine *Private Eye* satirised Russell's biographical films in a review of 'The Ken Russell Story'.[584] 'The Ken Russell Story' is described as a film that "plays fancy free with the few known facts of Russell's life" and its synopsis outlines: "A million nude nuns running across the Sahara Desert in slow motion. A trainload of lunatics singing the Hallelujah Chorus as they plunge to their deaths from the Tay Bridge. A 20-minute sequence showing a young spastic girl disembowelling her pet budgerigar." [585] Furthermore, the censorship discourse around Russell's films is also satirised. The fictional review states that Glenda Jackson stars in 'The Ken Russell Story' as John Trevelyan, Secretary of the Board of the British Board of Film, and in "a fantasy sequence, Russell dresses up in a Nazi uniform and sprays Trevelyan [Glenda Jackson] with machine gun bullets when the latter threatens to cut one second of Russell's earlier masterpiece 'Bliss!' a film portrait of the Master of the Queen's Muzak."[586]

As television remains central to the construction and development of Russell's authorial reputation, it is also significant that Russell is parodied on television.[587] For example, *Dance of the Seven Veils* and *The Music Lovers* were both parodied in autumn 1972. The excesses of *The Music Lovers* fantasy sequences were parodied on *The Stanley Baxter Big Picture Show* (London Weekend Television, 16 October 1972) in the sketch: 'Ken Rissole's The Musex Lovers'. In a more absurd fashion, *Dance of the Seven Veils* was parodied on *Monty Python's*

[584] Later in the decade, Russell is similarly mocked for his excesses in *Punch*. In a casting call for upcoming fictional biographies (incl., William Wordsworth, Agatha Christie and Alexander Walker): *"*Actors, jugglers, celebrities, freedom fighters, stuntpeople, dwarves, freaks, deformed concert pianists, transsexual nuns, palaces, cathedrals, fully operational air forces, cemeteries, loony bins, ballrooms, cesspits, sewage farms and much much more" (Anon., 1977).
[585] Anon., 'New Films: The Ken Russell Story', *Private Eye* (241) (March 1971): 12.
[586] Anon., 'New Films: The Ken Russell Story'.
[587] Following this period, Russell was repeatedly satirised as tyrannical and his films parodied as laughably pretentious on *The Goodies* (BBC Two, 1970-1980). For example, Russell was parodied in the episode: 'The Movies' (BBC Two, 10 February 1975). Here, The Goodies consider Russell's 'The Life of Pablo Casals', where the cellist overheats into flames as a nun stripteases into a clown, to be pretentious. Russell is then fired from 'Pinetree' Studios but is considered to not be all bad because he "had Oliver Reed burned to death" in *The Devils*.

*Flying Circus* (BBC, 1969-1974) in the episode 'The Money Programme' (BBC One, 2 November 1972): in the sketch, 'Ken Russell's Gardening Club'. The Sketch begins with a parody of the 'viewer discretion' announcement that proceeded the transmission of *Dance of the Seven Veils* and is followed by a group of nuns, a Viking and a pantomime goose conducting an orgy in a flowerbed.[588]

### 3.4. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the most significant period of reputational development of Ken Russell's career. That is the moment at the beginning of the 1970s when Russell's popular reputation and public persona overwhelmed the artistic reputation he had established as a television director during the 1960s. Specifically, the reputational impact of *Dance of the Seven Veils* and *The Devils* resulted in Russell becoming firmly associated with authorial self-indulgence and excess, the intention to shock and controversy, and negative critical reception. This was considered to undermine his artistic reputation and serious consideration. Specifically, in relation to artistic-moral responsibility in regard to Russell misplacing his authorial talent. Following *The Devils*, the film critic Dilys Powell wrote in her review of *The Boy Friend* for *The Times* that "what I find unbearable […] is that his talent should be so destructive. […] What was indulgent becomes grotesque […]. But usually, the result is not satire but satiety. […] The talent is there all right. But somehow it is an appalling talent."[589]

As examined in Chapter One, the construction and development of Ken Russell's authorial reputation and public persona is representative of the 'Long Sixties'. Russell is significant because he engaged with the re-definition of the film director that is associated with the period. Here, Russell adopted a flamboyant public persona to distinguish himself from other television directors who crossed over into commercial cinema. This public persona corresponded with both his popular reputation as 'The Wild Man of the BBC' and contributed to the controversy

[588] The 'viewer discretion' announcement that preceded *Dance of the Seven* stated: "*Omnibus* now presents a new film by Ken Russell: *Dance of the Seven Veils*. It's been described as a 'harsh and at times violent caricature of the life of the composer Richard Strauss'. This is a personal interpretation by Ken Russell of certain real and many imaginary events in the composer's life. Among them are dramatised sequences about the War and the Nazi persecution of the Jews which include scenes of considerable violence and horror."

[589] Dilys Powell, 'Films: Guying the dolls: *The Boy Friend*', *The Sunday Times* (6 February 1972), BFI press clippings.

that surrounded *Dance of the Seven Veils* and *The Devils*. Specifically, Russell contradictorily foregrounded himself through a performance of the 'film director' through contrarian self-presentation and romantic self-discourse. Subsequently, Russell increasingly played-up to his public persona. For example, Russell sent-up his confrontation with Alexander Walker on *Russell Harty Plus* (London Weekend Television, 5 April 1974). Here, replacing a rolled-up copy of the *Evening Standard* with a feather duster.[590]

This chapter has also examined the critical reception of *Dance of the Seven Veils* and *The Devils*. It is important to note that it is assumed that *Dance of the Seven Veils* and *The Devils* were both universally condemned by critics. This examination has identified that that while *Dance of the Seven Veils* and *The Devils* both received negative press and critical receptions, critical response did not equate to universal condemnation. Regarding traditional criticism from a humanist perspective, Russell's authorship is a central feature in regard to artistic-moral responsibility and authorial self-indulgence. Particularly, in regard to authorial talent, interpretation and style. Russell was considered to have failed to meet the critical expectations of his artistic reputation and those of literary adaptation and historical drama. And instead confirm those critical expectations associated with his popular reputation. Particularly, in regard to authorial self-indulgence and excess. Rather, a central concern for traditional critics was the appropriate approach style and tone for serious historical and biographical subject-matter and themes. Specifically, the inappropriateness of burlesque or 'sending-up' as a form of satire to 'send-up' the established romantic conventions of television biography and provide critical or ironic commentary of the biographical subject and historical period. Here, tonal ambiguity, anachronism and excess were considered to undermine historical and dramatic verisimilitude and characterisation. Furthermore, the intention to shock, through the graphic representation of violence and eroticism, was considered to trivialise the subject-matter and themes. Subsequently, Russell was considered unable to reproduce the artistic quality of his BBC television biographies: *Elgar* and *Song of Summer*.

Additionally, it is important to note the reputational impact of *Dance of the Seven Veils* and *The Devils* on both Russell's institutional and industrial statuses. Regarding *Dance of the Seven*

[590] Russell later made an appearance on *Russell Harty* (LWT, 27/03/1975) with Roger Daltrey to promote *Tommy*. Here, Russell interrupts the interview with Daltrey with his dog. Russell then decries critics and advocates passionately for rock music and films in British culture. Significantly, Harty again corrects Russell that he does not only receive a negative critical reception.

*Veils* and institutional status, Russell reached the limits of creative autonomy permitted to high-status freelance writers-directors at the BBC in regard to generic and formal experimentation in the dramatised documentary and television biography as a legitimate factual arts programming. And while Russell crossed over to commercial television during the late 1970s, with the support of former BBC colleagues Norman Swallow and Melvyn Bragg, he did not return to BBC arts programming as a filmmaker until *The Mystery of Dr Martinu*. Similarly, *The Devils* had a considerable impact on Russell's industrial status within the commercial film industry. Following *Women in Love*, Russell was a fashionable director and was supported by the British subsidiaries of American film studios; despite their withdrawal from the British film industry at the end of the 1960s. Russell's relationship with these American film studios cooled considerably following *The Devils* and as a consequence, despite the continued support of the film executive Robert Littman and producers Roy Baird and Harry Benn,[591] Russell adapted to seeking alternative sources of film finance – including at times, working as a 'director-for-hire' in the US – for the rest of his career.

The reputational impact of *Dance of the Seven* and *The Devils* is also significant because Russell's reputation and public persona become central features in the critical reception of his films. Subsequently, Russell's popular reputation for controversy and his public persona as an *enfant terrible* become his primary reputation and persona henceforth, and structure critical expectations and assessments for the rest of his career. For example, Russell's later reputational construction and interpretation through cult discourse. This reputational development will be examined in the following chapter.

[591] Robert Littman was Head of MGM European production programme during the production of *The Boy Friend,* negotiated *Tommy* (Ken Russell, 1975) with Columbia prior to becoming Russell's agent.

## 4. Reputational Decline, Maintenance and Cult Reappraisal: Ken Russell during the 1980s and 1990s

The purpose of this chapter is to examine Ken Russell's late career from the mid-1980s in relation to reputational decline. Primarily, this chapter will examine the negative reputational impact of Russell's return to British cinema in the mid-1980s and the BBC in the early 1990s, Russell's attempt to maintain his reputation through a performance of his authorial persona as an *enfant terrible*, and the development of Russell's cult reputation during the 1990s. Regarding British film criticism, the 1980s and 1990s represents the introduction of new media technologies, such as home video and satellite television, which resulted in the expansion of media criticism and commentary, and the development of niche film criticism. Therefore, this chapter scrutinises the development of Russell's authorial reputation and public persona in relation to the development of niche criticism during the 1980s. Ernst Mathijs and Jamie Sexton defined niche criticism as "a form of criticism that has a strong emphasis on alignment toward, closeness to and experience of the object of scrutiny."[592] Furthermore, the shift from traditional to niche criticism was defined by the legitimisation of cult film sensibilities and the increasing centrality of film fandom which resulted in the emergence of niche taste cultures, the modification of critical standards, and the construction of new hierarchies of value.

Following the release of *Tommy* (Ken Russell, 1976), a commercially successful adaptation of The Who's rock opera of the same name, Ken Russell became increasingly out-of-step with British film culture and contemporary taste. And as the 1970s progressed, Russell's reputation declined following the commercial and critical failure of a series of film and television biographies: *Lisztomania* (Ken Russell, 1975), a biography of the Hungarian composer Franz Liszt which incorporated burlesque, *Valentino* (Ken Russell, 1977), a biography of the silent film star Rudolf Valentino that incorporated the structure of *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941), and *Clouds of Glory* (Granada Television, 1978). The latter encompasses two separate television biographies for Granada Television, about the Lakeland Poets William Wordsworth, *William and Dorothy* (Granada, 9 July 1978), and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rime of the*

[592] Ernest Mathijs and Jamie Sexton, *Cult Cinema: An Introduction* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 52.

*Ancient Mariner* (Granada, 16 July 1978), which were produced by former BBC colleague Norman Swallow.[593]

Following *Clouds of Glory*, career opportunities became increasingly precarious for Ken Russell.[594] He responded to wider developments in the cultural industries by initially working as a 'director-for-hire' in the United States, with the science-fiction film *Altered States* (Ken Russell, 1980) and the satirical erotic thriller *Crimes of Passion* (Ken Russell, 1984).[595] Later in the decade, Russell returned to television programming with contributions to *The South Bank Show* (London Weekend Television, 1978-2010) and developed a relationship with the American video distributor Vestron Pictures who, after distributing *Gothic* (Ken Russell, 1986), produced a series of low-budget films that blurred cultural distinctions: *Salome's Last Dance* (Ken Rusell, 1988), *The Lair of the White Worm* (Ken Russell, 1988) and *The Rainbow* (Ken Russell, 1989). During this period, Russell also diversified as an intermedial professional, directing both operas and music videos,[596] and foregrounding his public persona as *enfant terrible* through various media appearances.[597]

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[593] The cumulative reputational impact of *Lisztomania*, *Valentino* and *Clouds of Glory* is significant. Both *Lisztomania* and *Valentino* were largely considered by critics to be self-indulgent and inaccurate, the former burlesque incorporated the idiom of rock opera, and hateful. *Clouds of Glory* was compared negatively to his earlier BBC biographies. Here, Russell was considered to neither meet the expectations of his own artistic or popular reputations.

[594] During this period, Russell has an extensive shadow career of unrealised films that were developed to the point of production. Unrealised films include: *Dracula* (1979); *The Beethoven Secret* (1980), a biography of Ludwig van Beethoven starring Anthony Hopkins; *Horrible Beauty* (1980), an adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe; *Callas* (1983), a biography of Maria Callas starring Sophia Loren; Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Evita* (1982); *Moll Flanders* (1986), an adaptation of Daniel Defoe produced by Bob Guccione and Harry Alan Towers which caused press controversy; and adaptation of D.H. Lawrence's *St Mawr* (1988).

[595] Regarding British critical reception, *Altered States* was considered Russell's best film since *Tommy*. Critics considered Russell's hallucinogenic imagery appropriate for a science-fiction film that combined the narrative and themes of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* with Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception*. Alternatively, some critics considered Russell to self-plagiarise his own imagery. *Crimes of Passion*, a low-budget satire about the American middle-class sexuality, was considered controversial because of its representation of prostitution and sexual violence. Furthermore, critics considered the film's ambiguous tone – for example, the send-up of the erotic films Zalman King and *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) – to be problematic and compared it negatively to the films of Brian De Palma.

[596] Regarding opera, Russell applied his burlesque approach to Igor Stravinsky's *Rakes Progress* (Florence, 1982) with Derek Jarman as production designer, Giacomo Puccini*'s Madame Butterfly* (Spoleto, Melbourne, and Houston, 1983) and *La Bohème* (Macerata, 1984)., Gioachino Rossini's *The Italian Girl in Tangiers* (Geneva, 1984), Bernd Alois Zimmermann's *Die Soldaten* (Lyon, 1985), Charles Gounod's *Faust*, (Vienna, 1985), Arrigo Boito's *Mefistofele* (Genoa, 1987) and Richard Strauss's *Salome* (Bonn, 1993). Earlier, Russell withdrew from Peter Maxwell Davies *Taverner* (1972) and for several years, he was scheduled to direct an English National Opera (ENO) production of Richard Wagner's *Tannhäuser*.

[597] From the mid-1980s until the end of the decade, Russell directed music videos for Cliff Richard (*She's So Beautiful*, 1985), Elton John (*Nikita*, 1985 and *Cry to Heaven*, 1986) and Sarah Brightman (*All I Ask of* You, 1986 and *The Phantom of the Opera*, 1986). Russell further associated himself with the medium through television appearances as a music video director, including *Video Jukebox* (BBC One, 9th May 1986) for *Arena* and *In at the Deep End* (BBC1, 10 /02/1987), and parodied music chart television in *Ken Russell's ABC of Music* (LWT, 02/05/1988) for *The South Bank Show*.

Throughout this period, negative critical assessments and sustained controversy contributed to a narrative of career and reputational decline. Barry Keith Grant identified that by the 1980s, Ken Russell had a acquired a reputation for being: "vulgar, tasteless, excessive, puerile, misogynistic, and even misanthropic".[598] The contemporaneous critical position was that as an *enfant terrible*, Russell had not sufficiently matured as a filmmaker and that his talent, including his ability to shock, had diminished. Specifically, it was considered that authorial self-indulgence, unrestrained excess and courting controversy had undermined and overwhelmed his authorial talent and artistic reputation. Furthermore, Russell's approach, style and imagery were considered increasingly outdated, clichéd and indistinguishable from self-parody; especially regarding sexualised imagery of misbehaving nuns and caricatured Nazis. A repeated charge about Russell during the period is summarised by Andy Lavender in *The New Statesman*: Russell had become the "Benny Hill of high culture."[599]

Reputational decline is also illustrated in the critical reception of a repeat transmission of *Elgar: Portrait of a Composer* for *Arena*; re-titled as *Ken Russell's Elgar* (BBC Two, 20 March 1984).[600] Here, Ken Russell's contemporaneous reputation was assessed. In *The Guardian*, Nancy Banks-Smith concluded that: "It marks not so much the 50th anniversary of Elgar's death as the birth of a flamboyant and full-bodied filmmaker. It must, I imagine, irritate Russell a good deal to be told, with that undertow of reproach, that he was such a beautiful baby, what happened?"[601] Similarly, Herbert Kretzmer in the *Daily Mail* concluded: "far better to have the fresh appealing, and accessible example of Russell's talent before the sourness set in."[602]

This chapter examines Ken Russell in relation to reputational decline, self-maintenance and rehabilitation and is accordingly separated into three sections. The first part of this chapter assesses Russell and reputational decline. This specifically includes: the negative reputational impact of a series of returns that reinforced a narrative of failure: the return to British cinema in the mid-1980s, the return to D. H. Lawrence as literary source material, and the return to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). Regarding the return to British cinema in the mid-

[598] Barry Keith Grant, 'The Body Politic: Ken Russell in the 1980s', in *Fires Were Started*, Lester Friedman ed., Second ed. (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), 182.
[599] Andy Lavender, 'Think of England', *New Statesman* (20 November 1992), BFI press clippings.
[600] *Valentino* received its television premiere on Channel 4 the same evening (20/03/1984). This was referenced in the critical reception of this repeat of *Elgar*.
[601] Nancy Banks-Smith, 'Television: Class of '62: *Arena*, Ken Russell 's *Elgar* (BBC 2)', *The Guardian* (March 1984).
[602] Herbert Kretzmer, 'The Springtime of Russell', *Daily Mail* (March 1984).

1980s, I will analyse the combined critical reception of the Vestron films: *Gothic*,[603] a hybrid biographical-horror film about the conception of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*; *Salome's Last Dance*,[604] a self-referential burlesque adaptation of the Oscar Wilde play; and *The Lair of the White Worm*,[605] a horror-comedy adaptation of the Bram Stoker novel.[606] Regarding the return to Lawrence and the BBC, I will also analyse the critical reception of Russell's final film for Vestron and final television production for the BBC: *The Rainbow* and *Lady Chatterley* (BBC One, 1993).[607] This combined critical reception is analysed in relation to the shift from traditional to niche criticism and the development of a more personalised mode of critical taste, standards and values.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Ken Russell was still associated in British popular culture with the figure of the temperamental film director and prefixed in the media as controversial. Therefore, the second part of this chapter scrutinises Russell's attempt at reputational maintenance as his career declined. Specifically, Russell increasingly foregrounded his public persona as an *enfant terrible* from the mid-1980s to counter reputational decline. As part of this reputational self-maintenance, Russell simultaneously played-up to and sent-up his persona as *enfant terrible*. Particularly, through a combination of contrarian self-presentation and romantic self-discourse. Regarding reputational maintenance and self-presentation, I will primarily analyse instances of Russell deliberately performing the *enfant terrible* in the documentaries he made for *The South Bank Show* and related media appearances.

This section further considers Ken Russell being increasingly evaluated against his public persona from the mid-1980s. A significant difference from the beginning of the 1970s was that during his later career, Russell's contrarian self-presentation was undermined by a comparatively diminished ability to shock. Therefore, Russell increasingly positioned himself through romantic self-discourse as a critically marginalised outsider. During this period, Russell's contrarian self-presentation is also further complicated because of ambiguity. Here, one encounters an unclear distinction between whether he is being serious or that he is

[603] As stated later, *Gothic* premiered on British television as part of *Moviedrome* (BBC2, 11/07/1993) and has since been repeated several times on British terrestrial television: BBC1, 21/12/1994; BBC1, 27/06/1996; BBC1, 24/10/1997.
[604] *Salome's Last Dance* premiered on British terrestrial television on Channel 4 (10/03/1996).
[605] *Lair of the White Worm* premiered on British terrestrial television on Channel 4 (23/05/1992) and has been repeated several times after: Channel 4, 23/05/1992; Channel 4, 17/06/1995; Channel 4, 8/11/1996.
[606] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor & Jones, 1818); Oscar Wilde, *Salome* (Elkin Mathews & John Lane, 1894); Bram Stoker, *The Lair of the White Worm* (William Rider and Son, 1911).
[607] D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow* (Methuen & Co., 1915); D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (Penguin, 1960).

intentionally playing-up to or sending-up his public persona as *enfant terrible*. Accordingly, this contributed to a charge of self-parody and a reluctance to take him seriously.

The third part of this chapter scrutinises reputational rehabilitation. Especially, the relationship between the transition from traditional to niche criticism, cult fandom and the legitimisation of cult taste and discourse, and the development of Ken Russell's reputation as a cult filmmaker. Primarily, this section analyses the development of Russell's cult reputation during the 1990s. In line with British cult film sensibilities, Russell's cult reputation was constructed from his established reputation and public persona as *enfant terrible*. Here, Russell was re-appraised and romanticised from an *auteurist* perspective because of his association with several factors: the 'Long Sixties' and permissiveness; controversy and the discourse around film censorship; authorial self-indulgence, excess and contrarianism; and negative critical reception. Furthermore, Russell's cult reputation was reinforced by his more recent association with the horror genre and home video, low production values and lowbrow aesthetics, and his return to amateur filmmaking.[608] In relation to the development of Russell's cult reputation during the 1990s, this section will examine the framing of Russell as cult filmmaker on television and on home video, the re-evaluation of *The Devils* as a horror film and Russell's return to amateur filmmaking.

As stated in the previous chapters, the 'Long Sixties' was conceptualised by Arthur Marwick as the period between 1958 and 1974 where socio-cultural hierarchies, boundaries and legitimate taste were redefined.[609] Particularly, the renegotiation between public and private behaviour associated with the permissive society and its representation in the media. This chapter specifically analyses the relationship of the 'Long Sixties' regarding the development of both British film culture and Ken Russell's reputation. In regard to British film culture, this chapter focuses on a new generation of film critics and publications who were informed by several interrelated factors: the legitimisation of popular culture and film authorship; the development of niche taste cultures and the legitimisation of cinephile and cult sensibilities; the introduction of new media technology and the expansion of media commentary; the transition from traditional film criticism to niche film criticism; the establishment of film

[608] Russell's association with the 'hellraiser' actor Oliver Reed also factors into the construction of Russell's British cult reputation. Here, the 'hellraiser' stereotype is associated with the permissive masculinity of 'Swinging London' and, alongside Reed, includes the actors: Richard Burton, Richard Harris and Peter O'Toole.

[609] Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, 1958-1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5-7.

studies as a new academic discipline; and the subsequent redefinition of critical taste and the revision of critical standards and values.

This section will also assess the selective re-framing of the 'Long Sixties' in relation to British film culture and the development of cult film sensibilities. In relation to Ken Russell, this concerns the development of a cult reputation that has primarily centred around the re-evaluation of *The Devils* and its re-categorisation as a horror film. Here, Ernest Mathijs's model of cult reputation is significant because it proposes that the reputational impact of a film increases when its production and reception circumstances are topical to contemporary culture and cause controversy.[610] And regarding Russell and *The Devils*, this concerns contemporary debates around film censorship during both the 'Long Sixties' and the 1990s. This includes but is not limited to: the liberalisation of film censorship at the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) during the 1960s; controversies in relation to permissiveness and the increasing representation of sex and violence from the late-1960s; the censorship of *The Devils* and the removal of filmed material prior to the film's BBFC certification; and the anti-permissiveness backlash to the film which resulted in it being banned by several local councils.

### 4.1. Ken Russell and Reputational Decline: a series of returns and failures

As previously mentioned, Ken Russell's later career is defined by the reputational impact of a series of returns that were considered failures and which contributed to a narrative of reputational decline. This includes: the cumulative negative reception that followed Russell's return to British cinema in the mid-1980s, his return to D. H. Lawrence as source material and his final return to the BBC as a filmmaker. Regarding negative reception, Russell was considered to neither meet the critical expectations associated with both his artistic and popular reputations, nor meet the contemporary critical standards associated with literary adaptation, historical drama and the horror genre. And in failing to do so, this both confirmed and further reinforced his growing reputational decline.

[610] Ernest Mathijs, 'The Making of a Cult Reputation: Topicality and Controversy in the Critical Reception of *Shivers*', in *Defining Cult Movies; The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 109–26.

The 1980s to the early 1990s represents a period of transition in which the British film and television industries were restructured. At the beginning of the 1980s, the decline in domestic film production and cinema attendance was countered through a series of industrial measures defined by corporate integration between the film and television industries and deregulation: primarily, the Broadcasting Act of 1980 and subsequent Broadcasting Act of 1990, which resulted in the introduction of Channel Four in 1982 and stimulated the independent production sector, and the Films Act of 1985, which dissolved the National Film Finance Corporation (NFCC) and abolished the Eady Levy. This period is also further defined by the introduction and cultural impact of new media technologies, such as home video and satellite television, and increasing synergy between mediums and modes. This is represented in both the development of the music video and the modification of the film classification system because of the intense discourse around media violence. Furthermore, the introduction of home video also stimulated investment in film production from video distributors. For example, from the British distributor Palace Pictures and international distributors such as: The Cannon Group, Vestron Pictures and Trimark Pictures.

Regarding British film culture, the 1980s also represents the institutionalisation of film studies and the legitimisation of British cinema, and the development of niche film criticism and the legitimisation of cult film sensibilities. Correspondingly, John Hill identified that British cinema during the 1980s was increasingly "promoted in terms of personal approaches and style" and, alongside an established middlebrow cinema based on definitions of quality associated with literary and theatrical culture, could be characterised by a "new hybridity and blurring of aesthetic boundaries".[611] Primarily, this was represented through the institutionalisation of a national art cinema, facilitated through a partnership between the BFI Production Board and Channel Four Films, and the development of the heritage film; represented by filmmakers such as Derek Jarman and Peter Greenaway, as well as Merchant-Ivory. Furthermore, British films of the period were in line with contemporary revisionism in wider film culture and, drawing on romantic and modernist national-cultural traditions, increasingly merged realism and fantasy.

[611] John Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 65-66.

After working as a director-for-hire in the United States from the late 1970s, Ken Russell returned to the British film industry during the mid-1980s.[612] On return, Russell sought alternative sources of finances and adapted to new technologies, mediums and genres. Primarily, in relation to video but also more traditional mediums such as opera. On return, Russell also established Sitting Duck Productions with the intention of producing promotional material such as music videos and television commercials. Here, Russell held the belief that non-union professionals and their practices from the promotional video industry had revitalised the British film industry.[613] Furthermore, Russell did not find patronage with cultural institutions such as the BFI and Channel 4, like a younger generation of art filmmakers such as Jarman and Greenaway. Instead, Russell primarily found patronage on commercial television through *The South Bank Show*; edited by Russell's former *Monitor* (BBC, 1958-1965) colleague and screenwriter, Melvyn Bragg,

In the commercial cinema, Ken Russell forged a partnership with the American home video distributor Vestron and the producer Dan Ireland. Through Russell's partnership with Vestron Video, Russell attempted to adapt to a youth audience and thus became associated with the horror genre via the Vestron distributed *Gothic* (1986) and the Vestron produced *Salome's Last Dance* (1988) and *The Lair of the White Worm* (1988).[614] *Gothic* was written by Stephen Volk and dramatised the events that led to the conception of *Frankenstein* at the Villa Diodati on Lake Geneva in 1816.[615] In an attempt at appealing to a youth audience, Russell adopted an approach that merged the romantic biography with the horror genre, and historical reconstruction with music video aesthetics. Furthermore, the British Film Institute (BFI) attempted to legitimise the return of Russell to British cinema. In November 1986, *Gothic* both premiered at the 30th London Film Festival and was profiled in *Sight & Sound*.[616] This was followed in February 1987 with a National Film Theatre retrospective about Russell which opened with a preview of *Gothic* followed by a *Guardian Lecture* between Russell and *The*

[612] The mid-1980s was a moment of contradiction for the British film industry. This was represented in the promotional campaign 'British Film Year' (1985) undermined by the overreach and subsequent collapse of Goldcrest Films and Virgin Vision: following *Revolution* (Hugh Hudson, 1985) and *The Mission* (Roland Joffe, 1986), and *Absolute Beginners* (Julien Temple, 1986), *Captive* (Paul Mayersberg, 1986) and Russell's *Gothic*.
[613] Nigel Dempster, 'Call Me Sitting Duck', *Daily Mail* (21 November 1985), 23.
[614] *Gothic* was produced by Virgin Pictures. Vestron picked-up the North American distribution rights to *Gothic* after Atlantic Releasing withdrew because they had issues with quality; concluding the film was "unmarketable" (Gold, 1989: 36).
[615] Though Russell was hired by Virgin Vision to direct Volk's script, Russell had considered a television biography of Lord Byron while at the BBC. At one point he was in correspondence with Derek Marlowe, the author of *A Single Summer with L.B: The Summer of 1816* (1969) (BBC WAC, T53/118/2).
[616] Tim Pulleine, 'Russell's Romantics', *Sight & Sound* (55:4) Autumn 1986), 222.

*Guardian*'s film critic, Derek Malcolm.[617] Additionally, there was some minor pre-release controversy around the promotional material, due to sexual imagery modelled on Henry Fuseli's *The Nightmare* (1781), which resulted in the withdrawal of the film's poster from the London Underground.[618]

### 4.1.1. Ken Russell's Return to British Cinema: the critical reception of the Vestron films

As mentioned before, regarding British film criticism, the 1980s represents a seminal shift from traditional to niche film criticism and the modification of critical standards, and the construction of new hierarchies of value. Principally, the development of niche taste cultures and the subsequent shift from broad humanism to an experiential closeness defined by increasing critical identification as fans, the legitimisation of cult film sensibilities and a more serious consideration of film genre.

The reception of Ken Russell during this period is principally structured around his established authorial reputation and his failure to meet critical expectations. Specifically, the failure to meet the critical expectations associated with both his artistic and popular reputations, and the failure to meet contemporary critical expectations around genre. Significantly, these films were negatively received because of their perceived lack of quality and their burlesque approach towards both biographical and literary adaptation and the horror genre. Particularly, regarding lowbrow authorial taste and tonal ambiguity in relation to the concern whether Russell was intentionally sending himself and his subject-matter up. Furthermore, these later films were considered to confirm the established negative critical expectations associated with Russell's popular reputation. Specifically, Russell's inability to mature as an *enfant terrible*, the demise of his talent and ability to shock and the declining quality of his films. As a result, he was considered to have become outdated and clichéd.

Regarding the shift from traditional to niche film criticism, *Gothic* is particularly significant because it establishes a pattern of critical response that applied to Ken Russell throughout his later career. Rather than authorial responsibility, a central feature becomes Russell's reputation

[617] The Ken Russell season at the National Film Theatre: Russell was framed as much of cultural figure of the 1960s as Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger were to the 1940s (Elley, 1987).
[618] Anon., 'Ken Russell Tries to Salvage Gothic', *Independent* (3 February 1987), BFI press clippings.

itself and its divisiveness. This is clearly foregrounded in Martin Sutton's review of *Gothic* in *Films and Filming*:

> Those who view [Russell] as an iconoclast see his portraits of the artist as refreshingly irreverent, dispensing with conventional biographical forms in favour of a freer, satirical style, where the notion of 'creativity' is seen anew in the light of the artist's inner turmoil and the pressures of his society. Others view Russell's outpoint as mainly unrestrained, vulgar and flashy, with a single, crude idea about history and the artistic urge, and a schoolboy's appetite for shocking. The truth, as usual, lies somewhere between these two extremes.[619]

Throughout this period, Ken Russell's excesses and 'appalling' talent to shock are considered to have become increasingly trivial. Additionally, critics become less inclined to offer Russell and his films serious consideration. And this divisiveness begins to be replaced with derision.

Regarding traditional criticism, *Gothic* was evaluated as an embellished biographical film and considered to offer little insight into its subject-matter. The synthesis of the biographical film with the horror genre and music video aesthetics, combined with clichéd self-plagiarising imagery, was considered not only trivial but vulgar. Still influential as a film critic for the *Evening Standard*, Alexander Walker's review of *Gothic* sets a precedent regarding the centrality of Ken Russell's popular reputation to critical expectations. In his review, Walker argued *Gothic* was a "relapse back into the noisy and noxious excesses of the porno-biography style [Russell] invented in the 1970s", where artists "achieve their best work by manic exhibitionism and indulgence in sexual pathology."[620] Alongside distaste, a central concern for Walker since *The Devils* was the excessive physicality of Russell's films and its effect. Regarding *Gothic*, Walker hyperbolically describes this as: "piling bedlam on incest, rampant fantasy on the rankest vulgarity".[621]

*Gothic* was considered to fail both as a biographical film and a horror film. Principally, *Gothic* was considered to be poorly written, the direction outdated and the performances excessive. As previously stated, a central concern in the critical reception of *Gothic* was the

[619] Martin Sutton, 'Reviews: *Gothic*', *Films and Filming* (389) (February 1987), 37–38.
[620] Alexander Walker, 'Films: Byronic Excesses: *Gothic*', *Evening Standard* (26 February 1987), BFI press clippings.
[621] Walker, 'Byronic Excesses', BFI press clippings.

appropriateness of synthesising biographical film with the horror genre and music video aesthetics. Arguably, this was a continuation of traditional critics' concern for Ken Russell's burlesque approach in trivialising serious subject-matter.[622] Throughout the critical reception, *Gothic* was considered too excessive for a pastiche of the Gothic mode, and as a result, the 'fairground' was employed as a metaphor.[623] In *Films and Filming*, Martin Sutton identified this pastiche as: "images from 19th-century painters and 20th-century horror movies."[624] For example, Judith Williamson in the *New Statesman* argued Russell failed to represent the interiority necessary for gothic fiction and that his reliance on the visual clichés of horror made the "film resemble nothing so much as a ride in an old-fashioned ghost train".[625] Similarly, Richard Mayne argued in *The Sunday Telegraph* that: "*Gothic* is less a film than a frantic fairground ride through the haunted house or the tunnel of lust, with no crescendo and no climax – over the top all the way" and therefore the film was "intellectual equivalent of a plastic cheeseburger."[626] Similarly, Geoff Brown argued in *The Times* that the "atmospheric frenzy" left "a terrible intellectual vacuum."[627]

Considering Ken Russell's popular reputation as *enfant terrible* and its relation to maturity, a central metaphor employed in the criticism of the Vestron films is the 'schoolboy'. As stated above in Martin Sutton's review of *Gothic*, this relates to the 'schoolboy's appetite for shocking'.[628] In *The Daily Telegraph*, Mark Le Fanu modifies this to: "like the Fat Boy in Dickens, Russell wants to make our flesh creep."[629] In the critical reception of *The Lair of the White Worm*, a horror-comedy adaptation of Bram Stoker, this metaphor is expanded. In *The Listener*, Margaret Walters argued that Russell: "seems finally to have retreated into a totally private, schoolboyish world".[630] Furthermore, Walters concludes that this reduces the film to a joke and the "joke this time seems to be on Russell."[631] In the *Evening Standard*, Alexander

[622] 'Serious' biographical films about the historical events at the Villa Diodati that followed *Gothic* include: *The Haunted Summer* (Ivan Passer, 1988) and *Rowing with the Wind* (Gonzalo Suárez, 1988).
[623] Regarding authorial intention, there is evidence that the 'fairground' was intentional. For example, Russell states in an interview with *Screen International* that Stephen Volk's screenplay was a "carnival ride of activity […] once the laudanum goes down" (Bilbow, 1985: 33).
[624] Sutton, 'Gothic', 37.
[625] Judith Williamson, 'Cinema: Man, Myth and Maggots: *Gothic*', *New Statesman* (27 February 1987), BFI press clippings.
[626] Richard Mayne, 'Cinema: Mary Quite Extraordinary: *Gothic*', *The Sunday Telegraph* (1 March 1987), BFI press clippings.
[627] Geoff Brown, 'Cinema: Transplant of Real Sensitivity: *Gothic*', *The Times* (27 February 1987), BFI press clippings.
[628] Sutton, '*Gothic'*, 38.
[629] Mark Le Fanu, 'Films: Salvation in Sign Language: *Gothic*', *The Daily Telegraph* (27 February 1987), BFI press clippings.
[630] Margaret Walters, 'Cinema: Bohemian Rhapsody: *Lair of the White Worm*', *The Listener* (16 March 1989), 42.
[631] Walters, 'Bohemian Rhapsody'.

Walker concluded that *The Lair of the White Worm*: "suggests a writer-director in his second childhood who has forgotten even the things he learned in his first."[632]

Regarding the Vestron films, film critics considered Ken Russell's directorial approach outdated and integrated their concern over authorial responsibility with an evaluation of authorial taste and the intention behind it. As seen in Alexander Walker, the burlesque approach is considered to be not only trivial but vulgar.[633] This is likewise an explicit concern in the critical reception of *Salome's Last Dance*: a self-referential film in which a brothel, frequented by Oscar Wilde (Nickolas Grace), perform an amateur burlesque of the Wilde play.[634] Received by film critics as a literary adaptation, *Salome's Last Dance*'s Rabelaisian anachronisms were considered to be an affront to Oscar Wilde. For example, Anne Billson in *Monthly Film Bulletin* observed that: "[Wilde's] sensual corruption and passionate excess are replaced here by an orgy of seaside-postcard bawdiness".[635] Similarly, Shaun Usher in *The Daily Mail* argued that the film: "confuses flatulence and S & M voyeurism with Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley's degree of decadence."[636] Concerning authorial intention, a central issue is whether Russell is sending-up the subject-matter.[637] This uncertainty and the unintentional humour it causes is most clearly expressed in the critical reception of *Gothic*. For example, Nick Roddick in *Screen International* argued that the film's "overwhelming sense of penny-dreadfulness" would elicit "laughter, not terror" from audiences.[638] Similarly, Phillip French in *The Observer* derides that the film: "frequently induces the feeling that we're watching *Monty Python's Life of Byron*."[639]

The critical reception of Ken Russell's Vestron films also represents a shift from the taste, standards and values of traditional film criticism to niche film criticism. This is a result of the expansion of media commentary, the introduction of home video and the emergence of a new generation of film critics. Particularly, in listing magazines and youth-entertainment

[632] Alexander Walker, 'Films: *Lair of the White Worm*', *Evening Standard* (9 March 1989), BFI press clippings.
[633] As stated in the footnotes of Chapter Two, Russell's burlesque approach and style reaches its apotheosis in *Lisztomania*. Regarding critical reception, the excessive allusions and parodies were considered historically anachronistic and to overwhelm Liszt as a biographical subject. Russell was also considered to have pushed the burlesque and tonal ambiguity further than *Dance of the Seven Veils*, rendering the film not only trivial but vulgar.
[634] The development of *Salome*'s *Last Dance* began in 1978. After declining the role of Herod, Russell had planned to adapt Lindsay Kemp's *Roundhouse* production of *Salome* (The Roundhouse, London: 1977).
[635] Anne Billson, '*Salome's Last Dance*', *Monthly Film Bulletin* (July 1988), 209–10; Margaret Walters, 'Cinema: Kitsch and Makeup: Ken Russell's vulgarisation of Oscar Wilde: *Salome's Last Dance*', *The Listener* (7 July 1988), 33.
[636] Shaun Usher, 'Cinema: Russell's Oscar in appalling vulgarity: *Salome's Last Dance*', *Daily Mail* (1 July 1988) 36.
[637] Arguably, tonal ambiguity and an ironic sense of humour are characteristic of Russell's burlesque filmmaking style.
[638] Nick Roddick (NR), 'Gothic', *Screen International* (10 January 1987), 26.
[639] Phillip French, 'Cinema: Byron's House of Horrors: *Gothic*', *The Observer* (1 March 1987), BFI press clippings.

publications, which, as consumer guides, simultaneously privileged commercial genre films and, as fans, evaluated them in a more informal and ironic tone. In an interview with Minty Clinch for *Photoplay*, Russell himself commented on this shift in British film criticism:

> I blame the critics in Britain for making me out to be this idiotic monster who can't make films and creates trouble wherever he goes […] so it's become a case of give a dog a bad name. At least the conservative element seems to be waning a bit now […]. There's a new generation of young critics […] who are replacing the old codgers. They don't pre-judge like the old stagers who go in knowing what they are going to say before they see the film."[640]

This shift in British film criticism from traditional film criticism to niche film criticism is most clearly represented in the critical reception of *The Lair of the White Worm,* which, through niche criticism, received a contradictory response as a comedy-horror film. Beginning his career in listing-publications, the film critic Kim Newman is representative of this emerging generation of film critics. As a fan of horror films and his attempt to critically elevate the genre, Newman modifies traditional critical standards in his review of *The Lair of the White Worm* for *Monthly Film Bulletin*. For Newman, a central concern was that *The Lair of the White Worm* failed to meet contemporary critical expectations of the horror genre a Ken Russell "disdained to elaborate in any interesting way on the material" and proved he was "incapable of handling straight suspense, horror or supernatural sequences."[641] To compensate for this Newman argues that Russell "simply mounts the whole thing as a charade with video-worthy dollops of nudity and gore to leaven the laughs."[642]

Regarding traditional criticism, Quentin Falk in *Screen International* considered *The Lair of the White Worm* to be "reminiscent of the worst of Hammer [Film Productions]" and "unlikely to please even genre horror fans who will merely yawn at the familiar sadomasochistic excesses and find the effects laughable."[643] Similarly, Alexander Walker in the *Evening Standard* concluded that *The Lair of the White Worm* was "a farrago of special effects" and "would earn

[640] Minty Clint, 'Films of Passion: Ken Russell', *Photoplay* (March 1987), 42.
[641] Kim Newman, '*Lair of the White Worm*', *Monthly Film Bulletin* (April 1989), 116.
[642] Newman, 'Lair of the White Worm'.
[643] Quentin Falk (QSF), '*Lair of the White Worm*', *Screen International* (11 March 1989), 18.

scoffs from the video freaks".[644] And in *The Daily Mail*, Shaun Usher concurred and argued that because of the films poor quality, the laughs were on Russell.[645]

Prior to niche critical support from the perspective of cult fandom in the 1990s, a shift from traditional film criticism to niche film criticism can be identified in the mainstream press during the 1980s. Historically, Ken Russell's tonal ambiguity and sending-up was valued in traditional criticism that had cinephile sensibilities. On Russell's return to British cinema in the 1980s, a select number of film critics both placed Russell within national traditions and recognised his ironic sense of humour. Particularly, *The Guardian* film critic Derek Malcom and in the criticism of the specialist magazine *Films and Filming*.[646] Regarding Russell's Vestron films, Malcolm recognised Russell's humour as intentional. In his review of *Gothic*, Malcolm observed that "the general reception of Russell in his home country is the refusal to see that the man has a sense of humour as well as outrage" and argued that Russell has the "talent to appal but you have to admit he knows what he is doing".[647] As a comedy-horror film, pleasure in Russell's ironic sense of humour is foregrounded in Malcolm's review of *The Lair of the White Worm*. Here, Malcolm praised *The Lair of the White* as a "splendidly extravagant horror spoof" and "tongue-in-cheek horror fantasy".[648] And in contrast to the negative critical reception, "makes a virtue of its un-extravagant production values with its ironic sense of humour […] which asks to be enjoyed first and shivered at afterwards, if at all."[649]

Contrary to Kim Newman, some emerging film critics found pleasure in Ken Russell's ironic sense of humour and authorial taste. In *Films and Filming*, Martin Sutton states that *The Lair of the White Worm* "clearly exists within the realm of parody" and accepts that Russell is "relying on his image as a fang-in-cheek, camp entertainer".[650] In *What's On London*, James Cameron-Wilson argues that with "tongue plunged firmly in cheek, [Russell] is on better form than of late" and despite "tottering on a razor's edge between the plain dreadful and the

[644] Walker, '*Lair of the White Worm*'.
[645] Shaun Usher, 'Cinema: Destroyed by immoral learnings: *Lair of the White Worm*', *Daily Mail* (10 March 1989), 30.
[646] As stated elsewhere in thesis, film journalist Gordon Gow is central to the critical support of Russell in *Films and Films* (1954-1990). Russell also received serious consideration from *The Times* film critics: John Russell Taylor, who was appointed editor of *Films and Filming* in 1984, and David Robinson.
[647] Derek Malcolm, 'Films: Scare tactics that ruin the horror show: *Gothic*', *The Guardian* (7 February 1987), BFI press clippings.
[648] Derek Malcolm, 'Films: An American in Paris: *Lair of the White Worm*', *The Guardian* (9 March 1989), BFI press clippings.
[649] Malcolm, 'An American in Paris'.
[650] Martin Sutton, 'Lair of the White Worm', *Films and Filming* (401) (April 1989): 37.

wonderfully bizarre, *The Lair of the White Worm* is, if nothing else, an affectionate homage to the Hammer horror films of the 'Sixties."[651] Suzanne Moore expands this assessment in *New Statesman and Society* and positions Russell within national traditions. In her review of *The Lair of the White Worm*, Moore argued that it is: "a very English movie: its humour is part of the camp tradition that runs through the *Carry-On* films and Hammer Horror." Furthermore, Moore proposes that: "what he makes are not B-movies made strange by hindsight […] but contemporary films that hover between the tastelessly bad and the cultishly good."[652] Concluding that: "Russell […] proves once again that he is spiritually closer to Benny Hill as [Federico] Fellini."[653]

### 4.1.2 Ken Russell's Return to D. H. Lawrence: critical reception and failure

Considering reputational development and the subsequent reputational impact, Ken Russell attempted to return to adapting the novelist D. H. Lawrence to counter his declining reputation throughout the 1980s.[654] Previously, Russell had acquired the reputation of being an interpreter of Lawrence following the international success of *Women in Love* (Ken Russell, 1969). *Women in Love* reinforced Russell's artistic reputation and was largely considered, alongside the television biographies *Elgar* (BBC Television, 11 November 1961) and *A Song of Summer* (BBC One, 15 September 1968), as the high point of Russell's film career. However, D. H. Lawrence's reputation had also shifted since the 1960s. Lawrence had been re-evaluated from the perspective of second-wave feminism at the beginning of the 1970s. And in part to Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970), Lawrence's reputation had shifted from a symbol of sexual liberation, in relation to the permissive society, to that of a misogynist and oppressive toward women.[655] Furthermore, critical expectations in returning to Lawrence centred somewhat contradictorily around his established reputations. Specifically, Russell's artistic reputation associated with the prestige of his television biographies and the sensuality of *Women in Love*,

[651] James Cameron-Wilson, 'Cinema: On the razor's edge: *Lair of the White Worm*', *What's On In London* (8 March 1989), BFI press clippings.
[652] Suzanne Moore, 'Films: Vamping It Up: *Lair of the White Worm*', *New Statesman and Society* (17 March 1989), 38.
[653] Moore, 'Vamping It Up'.
[654] Throughout the 1980s, Russell attempted to return D. H. Lawrence. Russell had attempted to finance *The Rainbow* since 1983; stating that it had been turned-down by Goldcrest because it was considered "not to be a British film" (Bilbow, 1985: 415). Additionally, producer Walter Manley failed to raise finance for Russell's adaptation of *St Mawr*.
[655] Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1971).

his popular reputation for excess and association with permissive sexuality, and his contemporary critical reputation for diminishing talent and declining quality.

Regarding reputational development, *Women in Love* established both critical and popular expectations.[656] A commercial success, *Women in Love* was more critically divisive on its initial release than its subsequent understanding as an artistic achievement. The critical reception of *Women in Love* reinforced Ken Russell's artistic reputation and was primarily concerned with adaptation and the appropriateness of his authorial approach and style for D. H. Lawrence. Regarding fidelity, Russell was praised for finding a visual equivalent to Lawrence. In *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Richard Combs argued that Russell had been "careful to match the physical presence of the original."[657] Similarly, John Russell Taylor in *The Times* argued that the films' "extravagances correspond closely enough to Lawrence's descriptive purple prose."[658] Alternatively, some critics were divided over Russell's self-consciousness and inclusion of caricature. For example, Dilys Powell in *The Sunday Times* argued that *Women in Love* was a "series of quotations" whose "alien flippancies", such as burlesque, failed to capture the "dualism in Lawrence".[659]

Regarding Ken Russell's established artistic reputation as a television director, Margaret Hinxman in the *Sunday Telegraph*, concluded that the adaptation gave "due respect but not undue reverence" and that "it's Ken Russell's film, its excesses are all his. At worst, he seems like a gifted interior decorator […]. On the other hand, he has this genius for immersing himself in the subject, making it alive and new and popularly accessible."[660] Correspondingly, Penelope Houston in *The Spectator* argued that Russell's adaptation was "Isadoraian excursions into Lawrentian themes", a reference to of *Isadora, the Biggest Dancer in the World* (BBC One, 22 September 1966), which demonstrated: "Russell's special, hazardous gift: a kind of over-saturation, and an absolute genius for the purplier aspects of his subjects, which by the way of pastiche, decoration, allusion, musical reference, turns everything into a parade of

[656] *Women in Love* premiered on British terrestrial television as part of the 'The Monday Film' on BBC1 (22/12/1975) and has been repeated several times thereafter: 'The Best of British': BBC2, 21/01/1979; 'Glenda Jackson in …': BBC2, 11/10/1981; BBC2, 28/12/1982; BBC1, 15/07/1996; BBC2, 21/12/1997; BBC2, 04/01/2000; 'A Tribute to Alan Bates': BBC2, 18/01/2004; 'Ken Russell Season', More4, 03/07/2007.
[657] Richard Combs, 'Women in Love', *Monthly Film Bulletin* (January 1969), 263–64.
[658] John Russell Taylor, 'Films: Lawrence to the life: *Women in Love*', *The Times* (13 November 1969), BFI press clippings.
[659] Dilys Powell, 'Films: Sex-War without Rage: *Women in Love*', *The Sunday Times* (16 November 1969), BFI press clippings.
[660] Margaret Hinxman, 'Film: Look according to Lawrence: *Women in Love*', *Sunday Telegraph* (16 November 1969), BFI press clippings. .

sacred monsters."[661] Alternatively, the popular reputation of *Women in Love* was associated with permissiveness and the sexual liberation of the 1960s. This popular reputation largely centred on the wrestling scene between Gerald Crich (Oliver Reed) and Rupert Birkin (Alan Bates) that featured full-frontal male nudity. At the time of release this was topical because of the Sexual Offences Act (1967), which partially decriminalised homosexuality in the United Kingdom, but potential controversy was dispelled because of both Lawerence and Russell's artistic reputations.[662] Therefore, it was considered tasteful when retrospectively compared to *The Devils*.[663]

#### 4.1.2.1 *The Rainbow* (Ken Russell, 1989): critical reception

Ken Russell's second adaptation of D. H. Lawrence was *The Rainbow* and was considered to confirm his diminishing talent and declining reputation.[664] *The Rainbow* was written by D. H. Lawrence prior to *Women in Love* and followed several generations of the Brangwen family prior to the events of *Women in Love*. Ken Russell's adaptation was filmed as a prequel to Russell's adaptation of *Women in Love*; reuniting cast members such as actors Glenda Jackson and Christopher Gable, and crew members such as cinematographer Billy Williams and production designer Luciana Arrighi. Vestron's intention behind *The Rainbow* was to attract an older and more sophisticated audience, who was familiar with Russell's association with D. H. Lawrence, following *Salome's Last Dance* and *The Lair of the White Worm*.[665]

Regarding critical reception, *The Rainbow* was considered to neither meet the critical standards of contemporary literary adaptation, represented by the heritage film, nor match the artistic reputation of Ken Russell's previous Lawrence adaptation: *Women in Love*. Furthermore, *The Rainbow* was negatively received in comparison to a recent three-part quality television adaptation of *The Rainbow* (BBC One, 1988) written by Anne Devlin.[666] Primarily, *The*

[661] Penelope Houston, 'Film: Tremendous din: *Women in Love*', *The Spectator* (26 November 1969), BFI press clippings.
[662] Williams, 'Bad Sex and Obscene Undertakings: Ken Russell's Women in Love'.
[663] Anon., 'British Censer Greenlights Kramer's *Women in Love*', *Variety* (11 October 1969), 22.
[664] *The Rainbow* premiered on British television on Channel 4 (2/07/1995) and has been repeated several times thereafter: Channel 4, 20/04/1997; 'British Film Forever': BBC2, 20/08/2007; BBC2, 25/10/2009).
[665] Richard Gold, 'After handling three quirky Ken Russell pix, Vestron awaits the *Rainbow* payoff', *Variety* (10 May 1989), 36.
[666] In the *Daily Mirror*, Russell criticised the BBC adaptation as "pathetic" because he believed it was timid and misrepresented the novel (Bonner, 1988: 19).

*Rainbow* was considered to neither capture the maturity nor the artistry of *Women in Love*. Jill Forbes in *Monthly Film Bulletin* argued that in *The Rainbow* Lawrentian themes had been interpreted "as incipient feminism" rather than in the "mature form in which they can be found in *Women in Love*".[667] In relation to maturity, the critical reception centred on Russell's declining reputation and diminishing talent. In *Screen International*, Oscar Moore argued that in the time since *Women in Love*: "Russell's talent has become blunted […] declined into a coarseness that leaves *The Rainbow* looking more like Mills & Boon than Lawrence."[668]

Throughout the critical reception, a central criticism is that Ken Russell's approach to the source material is outdated and tame. Particularly, regarding the representation of sexuality which is considered to have become clichéd and unintentionally funny. Here, a repeated reference is to the comedy series *The Comic Strip Presents …* (Channel 4, 1982-1988). In *Screen International*, Moore derides that: "you half expect to see Vaseline smeared on the lens and a girl eating a Cadbury's Flake emerge from a Haywain."[669] Similarly, Ian Johnstone in *The Sunday Times* sarcastically praised: "good old Ken […] given the alibi of a couple of sentences in D H Lawrence's novel […] [he] soon has waterfalls and knickers tumbling down".[670] Reviewing for a younger audience in *Empire*, Anthony Quinn concluded that *The Rainbow* was a "Merchant-Ivory dress rehearsal" and "not so much a reappraisal of Lawrence from a 1980s perspective as a misguided attempt by a director trying to revive his flagging career."[671]

#### 4.1.2.2 *Lady Chatterley* (BBC One, 1993): critical reception

Ken Russell's third adaptation of D. H. Lawrence was *Lady Chatterley*. As a four-part BBC series transmitted on a Sunday evening during primetime, *Lady Chatterley* had a greater reputational impact than *The Rainbow*. Despite the negative critical reception of *The Rainbow* and reservations regarding Russell's declining reputation, Russell was hired to adapt *Lady Chatterley*, replacing the original director Christopher Mahoran, because of his association with Lawrence. Furthermore, Russell's adaptation of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was a highly

[667] Jill Forbes, '*The Rainbow*', *Monthly Film Bulletin* (January 1990), 22–23.
[668] Oscar Moore, 'Reviews: *The Rainbow*', *Screen International* (4 November 1989), 7.
[669] Moore, '*The Rainbow*'.
[670] Ian Johnstone, 'Cinema: Savagery to savour in a bitter war of words: *Rainbow*', *The Sunday Times* (12 March 1989), 79.
[671] Anthony Quinn, 'Reviews: *The Rainbow*', *Empire* (5) (November 1989), 79.

anticipated production because of the controversial reputation of the novel and Russell's artistic and popular reputation. Prior to transmission, there was intense press speculation over a Russell adaptation of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* concerning adapting the sexual nature of the novel for television and Russell's relationships with the original scriptwriter Ken Taylor, who had adapted *Jewel in the Crown* (Granada Television, 1984) and *The Camomile Lawn* (Channel 4, 1992), and Joely Richardson.[672] Rather than a charge of sensationalism, the BBC attempted to dispel speculation that a Russell adaptation would be in poor taste. The BBC publicly re-assured that they aimed for a "tasteful" or "transmittable" production appropriately "toned-down" for a Sunday evening 'quality television' slot.[673] For example, Alan Yentob, Controller of BBC One, is quoted in *The Daily Telegraph* stating that: "I hope viewers will find nothing in it that will cause offence, Ken Russell made the programme to go out on BBC1."[674]

Regarding the critical reception of television, the development of a softer mode of television criticism impacted the evaluation of Russell's television output during the 1980s and 1990s. For reference, Paul Rixon identified that serious television critics increasingly approached television as a form of popular culture as television became the dominant medium during the 1960s; adopting a more popular writing style, that foregrounded their personality through humour, and modifying traditional standards and values to include experience as a viewer.[675] Regarding the critical reception of *Lady Chatterley*, its reception was indicated in the critical reception of *The Mystery of Dr Martinu* (BBC Two, 16 May 1992): an experimental television biography about the Czech composer Bohuslav Martinů. Significantly, *The Mystery of Dr Martinu* also represented Ken Russell's return to BBC arts programming after twenty-two years following the controversial *Dance of the Seven Veils:* a *comic strip in 7 episodes on the*

[672] Richard Brooks, 'Nothing beyond Our Ken', *The Observer* (3 May 1992), BFI press clippings; Ken Taylor, 'Lawrentian Emotions', *Hampstead and Highgate Express* (4 June 1993), BFI press clippings; Ken Taylor, 'Why the Lady Was Not for Turning', *Times Magazine* (5 June 1993), BFI press clippings; Baz Bamigboye, 'Friday's People: Chatterley romp set to rock the BBC', *Daily Mail* (19 July 1991), 27; Jill Parsons, '*Lady Chatterley*'s loser', *Daily Mail* (25 April 1992), BFI press clippings; Nigel Dempster, 'Mail Diary: Ken will be wearing the trousers', *Daily Mail* (30 July 1992), 23; Vikki Orvice, 'A new *Lady Chatterley* is poached by the gamekeeper', *Daily Mail* (10 March 1993), 18; Baz Bamigboye, 'Friday's People: Chatterley's too raunchy for Joely', *Daily Mail* (19 March 1993), 19; Baz Bamigboye, 'Why Joely and Ken clashed', *Daily Mail* (7 May 1993), 35; Lester Middlehurst, 'Friday's People: Why I am very happy to dance naked in the rain with Sean Bean', *Daily Mail* (4 June 1993), 48-49.

[673] Maggie Brown, 'Lawrence's Erotic Classic to Be Dramatised by the BBC', *The Independent* (22 July 1992), BFI press clippings; Steve Clarke, '*Lady Chatterley* Toned down for TV', *Daily Telegraph* (10 March 1993), BFI press clippings; Alexandra Frean, 'BBC Tones down *Chatterley's Lover* for the Adult Audience', *The Times* (10 March), 9; Maggie Brown, '*Lady Chatterley* Toned Down', *The Independent* (10 March 1993), BFI press clippings; Bamigboye, 'Chatterley's Too Raunchy for Joley'.

[674] Clarke, 'Lady Chatterley Toned down for TV'; Frean, 'BBC Tones down *Chatterley's Lover* for the Adult Audience'.

[675] Paul Rixon, *TV Critics and Popular Culture: A History of British Television Criticism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011): 57-58, 101-130.

*life of Richard Strauss, 1864-1949* (BBC One, 15 February 1970). Regarding critical reception, *The Mystery of Dr Martinu* was compared to Russell's earlier television biographies for the BBC and considered a failure. Despite a positive review from Nancy Banks-Smith of *The Guardian*, *The Mystery of Dr Martinu* was considered to confirm Russell's artistic reputation had declined because his authorial talent had diminished.[676] Particularly, *The Mystery of Dr Martinu* was considered to offer little biographical insight because Russell overwhelmed the subject-matter and that his counterpoint between music and images had become trivial.[677]

*Lady Chatterley* was considered to further confirm Ken Russell's diminishing talent and declining reputation. Moreover, editorial and authorial responsibility were central to the critical reception of *Lady Chatterley*. Throughout the critical reception, the failure of *Lady Chatterley* was blamed on the BBC for hiring Russell. For example, Steve Clarke in *The Daily Telegraph* queried: "why on Earth was Ken Russell chosen to direct *Lady Chatterley* when his reputation as a filmmaker has been on the decline for almost 20 years."[678] Comparable to the critical reception of *The Rainbow*, television critics primarily considered *Lady Chatterley* to neither meet the critical standards of literary adaptation associated with quality television, nor the critical expectations associated with either Russell's authorial reputation or *Women in Love*. Specifically, the failure to meet his artistic reputation of the 1960s and his popular reputation as *enfant terrible* from the 1970s. In the *Financial Times*, Christopher Dunkley expanded on this:

> in the past 30 years Russell never seems to have recaptured the flair he brought to his *Monitor* [dramatised documentaries] […] at the BBC in the early 1960s. Since then, he has been his best going wildly over the top, but it would seem unlikely the BBC would tolerate this in an adaptation which was always going to be touchy. Sure enough, we find neither the lyricism of *Song of Summer* nor the outrageousness of *The Devils* in *Lady Chatterley*.[679]

[676] Nancy Banks-Smith, 'Television: Freudian Views from the Lighthouse: *The Mystery of Dr Martinu* (BBC 2)', *The Guardian* (18 May 1992), BFI press clippings.
[677] Richard Last, 'Television: An Englishman abroad: *The Mystery of Dr Martinu* (BBC 2)', *The Daily Telegraph* (18 May 1992), BFI press clippings; Richard Morrison, 'Television: Martinu Shaken If Not Stirred: *The Mystery of Dr Martinu* (BBC 2)', *The Times* (18 May 1992), BFI press clippings.
[678] Steve Clarke, 'Why Did They Give the Job to Ken?', *Daily Telegraph* (24 June 1993), 19.
[679] Christopher Dunkley, 'Television: Strength depends on the writing: *Lady Chatterley* (BBC 1)', *Financial Times* (9 June 1993), BFI press clippings.

Simply, the adaptation was: "neither a faithful version of the printed original nor an outrageous Russell romp."[680] As indicated, attempting to tone-down Lawrence was considered to undermine the adaptation. In *The Daily Mail*, Marcus Berkmann argued this timid approach resulted *Lady Chatterley* having: "a strange void at its centre, a passionless that is no doubt borne of the BBC's desire to be as inoffensive as possible."[681]

*Lady Chatterley* was considered to be poorly written and directed and this confirmed both Ken Russell's diminishing talent and declining reputation. Television critics considered *Lady Chatterley* to be crudely written, ineptly directed and clichéd. In the *Evening Standard*, Matthew Norman commented that it was "a production that in all honesty, Michael Winner would have struggled to direct to worse effect".[682] As indicated, *Lady Chatterley* was considered unintentionally funny and not taken seriously by critics. Here, critics adopted a corresponding tone. For example, Craig Brown in *The Sunday Times* sarcastically proposed: "will *Lady Chatterley* take its place among the comedy classics?".[683] And after comparing the *Lady Chatterley* to the television sitcoms *Fawlty Towers* (BBC Two, 1974-1979) and *Brass* (Granada Television and Channel 4, 1983-1990), proposed on identifying innuendo-laden dialogue: "did I detect a homage to *Are You Being Served?* [BBC One, 1972-1985]".[684] Furthermore, Hugh Herbert in *The Guardian* concluded that: "one achievement of Ken Russell's *Lady Chatterley* […] is to turn Lawrence's novel into pure farce, except when it is pure parody of his film *Women in Love*."[685]

D. H. Lawrence and Ken Russell's adaptation of *Women in Love* were associated with the sexual permissiveness of the 1960s. Particularly in the tabloid press, *Lady Chatterley* was derided for its outdated approach and clichéd representation of sex. Regarding derision, a significant reference in the reception of *Lady Chatterley* was to the moral campaigner, Mary Whitehouse. In *The Sun*, the series was criticised for being "full of innuendo but precious little

[680] Christopher Dunkley, 'Television: Good sports come dressed to kill: *Lady Chatterley* (BBC 1)', *Financial Times* (30 June 1993), BFI press clippings.
[681] Marcus Berkmann, 'TV: Letting sex call the shots: *Lady Chatterley* (BBC 1)', *Daily Mail* (19 June 1993), BFI press clippings.
[682] Matthew Norman, 'Television: Chatterley at the Crossroads: *Lady Chatterley* (BBC 1)', *Evening Standard* (7 June 1993), BFI press clippings.
[683] Craig Brown, 'Television: Wayward Nobility: *Lady Chatterley* (BBC 1)', *The Sunday Times* (13 June 1993), BFI press clippings.
[684] Brown, 'Wayward Nobility' BFI press clippings.
[685] Hugh Hebert, 'Television: *Lady Chatterley* (BBC1)', *The Guardian* (28 June 1993), BFI Press Clippings.

action" and "the first Russell adaptation that would get a thumbs up from Mary Whitehouse."[686] Furthermore, Whitehouse's own assessment of *Lady Chatterley* was reported in the *Evening Standard*: "the only good thing was the scenery, and the fact that the four-letter words had been cut. But the sex scenes were absolutely ludicrous."[687] And in consideration of Whitehouse's opposition toward Russell in the early 1970s, the assessment of tameness is considered to illustrate Russell's diminishing talent, particularly his ability to shock, and therefore confirm his declining reputation.

As will be discussed in the following section, Ken Russell foregrounded his public persona as a form of reputational maintenance to counter reputational decline. Therefore, a significant criticism of *Lady Chatterley* was Russell's own performance as Constance Chatterley's father, 'Sir Malcolm Reid'. Throughout the critical reception, Russell's performance was considered self-parodic of his public persona; in excess of the diegesis which undermined verisimilitude and serious adaptation.[688] In *The Times*, Lynne Truss commented:

> Ken Russell not only turns up on screen in *Lady Chatterley* as Connie's white-haired brick-faced father […] but also raises several genial glasses to the audience by using overtly Ken Russell music, Ken Russell painted faces, and by displaying Ken Russell disregard for adequate lip-sync. On top of which there is the hilarious moment when Connie is advised to pop down the woods "to get some colour in her cheeks", when a large Ken Russell actually comes barging out of the television screen and nudges the viewer in the ribs.[689]

As indicated, Russell's performance was considered knowingly vulgar and a central reason for the unintended humour in *Lady Chatterley*. Furthermore, Russell's appearance was ridiculed. In *The Independent*, Giles Smith described this performance as "Toad of Toad Hall".[690] And

[686] Gary Leboff, 'TV: *Lady Chatterley* (BBC 1)', *The Sun* (7 June 1993), BFI press clippings; Anon., 'TV: No Nudes Is Bad News for *Lady Chatterley* (BBC 1)'', *The Sun* (9 June 1993), BFI press clippings.
[687] Anon., '*Lady Chatterley* ludicrous, says Mrs Whitehouse', *Evening Standard* (14 June 1993), BFI press clippings.
[688] Despite Russell's performance in *Lady Chatterley*, it can be assumed that he neither had the intention to send-up either *Lady Chatterley's Lover* or his own adaptation of *Women of Love*.
[689] Lynne Truss, 'Television: Axels, elbows and the promise of woodland games: *Lady Chatterley* (BBC 1)', *The Times* (7 June 1993), BFI press clippings.
[690] Giles Smith, 'Television: Horse Play: *Lady Chatterley* (BBC 1)', *The Independent* (7 June 1993), BFI press clippings.

in *The Observer*, John Naughton argued that Russell, "looking like a lobster left out in the sun, stole the show."[691]

## 4.2 Ken Rusell and Reputational Maintenance: countering reputational decline through foregrounding public persona and autobiography

During the 1980s and 1990s, Ken Russell attempted reputational maintenance as his career declined. As part of a strategy to counter reputational decline, Russell increasingly focused on his public persona as *enfant terrible* and autobiography in the media from the mid-1980s onwards: particularly, through media appearances, including press and television interviews, and the dramatised documentaries he made for *The South Bank Show*.

As examined in previous chapters, the development of Ken Russell's public persona is representative of the 'Long Sixties'' and the shift, identified by Sue Harper and Justin Smith, in self-presentation and performance at the beginning of the 1970s toward the mannered and knowingly, or ironic disavowal.'[692] For reference, Russell established a popular reputation, alongside his artistic reputation, for waywardness as 'The Wild Man of the BBC' during the 1960s. At the beginning of the 1970s, Russell developed a corresponding flamboyant public persona to distinguish himself from other television directors crossing-over into the commercial cinema. As a result of the sustained controversy that surrounded *Dance of the Seven Veils* and *The Devils*, Russell became firmly associated with authorial self-indulgence and excess, mislaid talent, negative critical reception and, in relation to contemporary debates about cultural permissiveness, controversy.

Consequently, Ken Russell became a media personality and his public persona was increasingly fixed as an *enfant terrible*, which established a set of public and critical expectations. In British popular culture, Russell became associated with the figure of the flamboyant and temperamental film director. Furthermore, Russell's flamboyant public persona and the excesses of his films lent easily to satire and were thus repeatedly parodied in

[691] John Naughton, 'Television: Bravura bit of a chat: *Lady Chatterley* (BBC 1)', *The Observer* (13 June 1993), BFI press clippings.
[692] Harper and Smith, *British Film Culture in the* 1970s, 188-189.

the media. Particularly, his image as a temperamental film director and the permissive imagery associated with *Dance of the Seven Veils* and *The Devi*ls.

Characterised by ironic disavowal, Ken Russell developed a self-conscious and self-reflexive performance of his public persona as *enfant terrible*. Here, Russell contradictorily both 'played-up' to his authorial reputation and 'sent-up' his public persona through a combination of contrarian self-presentation that contrasted with romantic self-discourse. Primarily, through self-romanticisation as a struggling artist and misunderstood outsider who found himself pre-judged because of his respective reputation. During this period, Russell also reinforced his own claims to romantic authorship as an artist through autobiography; specifically, through his autobiography *A British Picture* and his adaptation of it for *The South Bank Show*: *Ken Russell: A British Picture, Portrait of an Enfant Terrible* (London Weekend Television, 15 October 1989).[693]

Furthermore, Ken Russell's ironic disavowal was further underscored by ambiguity: whether his public persona was an authentic self-presentation or an intentional self-parodic performance. This unclear distinction contributed to the charge of self-parody and a reluctance to take him seriously.

### 4.2.2 Reputational Maintenance: Ken Russell's popular reputation and public persona as *enfant terrible* in print media

In an attempt at reputational self-maintenance, Ken Russell increasingly turned to the media to maintain his public profile. Particularly, new youth-entertainment publications. However, Russell's attempts were frequently undermined because he was evaluated against his popular reputation and public persona as *enfant terrible*. Principally, Russell was still pre-fixed as 'controversial' but was considered to have not matured as a filmmaker. Particularly, Russell's talent was considered to have diminished, including his 'appalling' talent to shock, which invited derision. And in accordance with reputational decline, a narrative around personal and professional failure was constructed around Russell as an ageing *enfant terrible*. For example, a typical framing is illustrated in Lynne Barber's article, 'The Impossible Romantic'', for the

[693] Ken Russell, *A British Picture: An Autobiography* (London: Heinemann, 1989).

*Independent on Sunday*, in which she introduces Russell as: "broke, neglected, and rows with his producers."[694]

Regarding media appearances, a noted feature in Ken Russell's self-presentation was that he was appropriately contrarian depending on the publication and journalist. That is, either being serious in established publications or playing-up to his reputation and sending-up his public persona in youth-entertainment publications. Furthermore, a central theme in the print media is the reference between either the similarities or differences between Russell's public persona and his private life. Occasionally, Russell's public persona was commented on as a construction. For example, Minty Clinch in *Photoplay* states: "popular mythology has Russell as a bombastic man, but popular mythology is wrong. One to one, he is quite reserved; on the job, he is decisive, purposeful and commendably brisk."[695] However, this would not merit an outright rejection of Russell's public persona but instead frame it as eccentricity.

A significant development for Ken Russell was the move toward youth-entertainment magazines. Rather than serious in-depth feature articles and interviews conducted with Russell, youth-entertainment magazines, alongside Russell himself, would contradictorily reproduce and reject the *enfant terrible*. In both *The Face* and *Blitz*, Neil Norman and Paul Morley foreground Russell's association with controversy, censorship and negative critical reception.[696] Moreover, youth-entertainment magazines frame Russell as outdated and additionally associate him with madness. Furthermore, Russell contributed to a narrative of failure through the reproduction of contrarian autobiographical anecdotes. This discursive framing later contributes to the construction of Russell's cult reputation.

As stated, a significant difference from the beginning of the 1970s was that Ken Russell's contrarian self-presentation was undermined by a diminished ability to shock. And as a result, contrarianism could be either interpretated as self-aware and self-deprecating or hypocritical. Regarding contrarianism, a common topic is the contemporary cinema and other film directors, Particularly, in regard to the British cultural and critical establishment and American filmmakers. For example, in an interview in *Q* with Simon Banner, Russell states: "better men

[694] Lynn Barber, 'The Impossible Romantic', *Independent on Sunday* (14 July 1991), BFI press clippings.
[695] Minty Clinch, 'Films of Passion: Ken Russell', *Photoplay* (March 1987).
[696] Neil Norman, 'Ken Russell: Grandaddy of Controversy', *The Face* (November 1985), BFI press clippings; Paul Morley, 'Mad, Ken Russell', *Blitz* (April 1989), BFI press clippings.

have been buried by the English critics [...] look how long it took them to appreciate Michael Powell." Similarly in *Empire*, Russell is quoted: "there are a lot of stupid people in the world and a lot of them are critics. It's not my fault they're stupid. I just think they're pathetic.[697] And on David Lynch in the *Independent on Sunday*: "he's like [Federico] Fellini, like a lot of filmmakers, they start off well but deteriorate because they use the same old gimmicks over and over."[698] During this period, this was a criticism levelled at Russell himself.

In line with the topicality of film censorship in the 1990s, a significant development in Ken Russell's contrarianism is a concern for media violence; specifically, in relation to the artistic responsibility of American filmmakers. In the *Daily Mail* article, ''Why I now believe in censorship', Russell is quoted in an interview with Lester Middlehurst: "The directors of films like *Trainspotting* [Danny Boyle, 1996] and *Crash* [David Cronenberg, 1996] do things that I wouldn't dream of. I believe there is a case for censorship. [699] Similarly, in the *Evening Standard* regarding the filmmaker Quentin Tarantino: "there has been a shift to sadism and every director in America seems to have to go one step further."[700] Seemingly, this contradicts both Russell's established popular reputation as *enfant terrible* and the contemporaneous development of his cult reputation. Furthermore, this implies that Russell is privately more conservative than his public persona as *enfant terrible* suggests.

From the late-1970s onwards, Kenn Russell had become a figure in the tabloid press following the divorce from his first wife, the costume designer Shirley Russell (née Kingdon). And regarding reputational decline, the representation of Russell in the tabloids contributes to the narrative of personal and professional failure. In comparison to his popular reputation and public persona, the tabloids largely focus on Russell's marital statuses and familial relationships. For example, the failures of Russell's second and third marriages are framed to confirm his public persona as *enfant terrible*. Primarily, Russell is represented as incompatible with domestic life, despite his own attempts at fatherhood and presenting ordinariness,[701]

[697] Lola Berg, 'Morning, Mr. Grumpy', *Empire* (5) (November 1989), BFI press clippings.
[698] Barber, 'The Impossible Romantic'.
[699] Lester Middlehurst, 'Ken Russell: Why I Now Believe in Censorship', *Daily Mail* (17 December 1996), BFI press clippings.
[700] Toby Rose, 'Ken Russell Hits out at "Sadistic" Festival No. 1', *Evening Standard* (February 1997), BFI press clippings.
[701] Anon., 'Ken Russell's Girl Has a Baby', *Daily Express* (2 January 1978), BFI press clippings; Anon., 'Lakes Tryst for Film Man Ken after Break-Up', *Daily Express* (18 January 1978), BFI press clippings; Nigel Dempster, 'Going West: Ken Russell and His Girl', *Daily Mail* (15 May 1978), BFI press clippings.

because of his temperamental personality and pre-occupation with his own career: a 'director' in his private life.[702]

Furthermore, the tabloid press typically sensationalises Ken Russell's private life. Russell's private life is largely reported to correspond with, and thus reinforce, his popular reputation and public persona as *enfant terrible*. Particularly in relation to the sexual nature of his films and their association with permissiveness and controversy.

However, this is primarily done in a derisive manner and thus undermines taking Russell seriously. For example, the *Daily Mail* ran a series of articles following tongue-in-cheek statements he made to the *Sunday Mirror* about wife-swapping at his local GP in the Lake District.[703] Regarding reports of Russell's marriages, sexual innuendo is commonly implied considering both the differences in age and appearance between Russell and his wives.[704] For example, Russell's second wedding onboard the retired Queen Mary ocean liner to Vivian Jolly is repeatedly described as "bizarre" in the tabloid press because the ceremony was conducted by Anthony Perkins, whose most famous role was 'Norman Bates' in *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), following the production of *Crimes of Passion* in which Perkins played 'Peter "Reverend" Shayne'.[705]

In the early-2000s, a significant tabloid story about Russell concerns his fourth marriage to Elize "Lisi" Tribble. Here, Russell advertised for a companion on the fan website *Savage Messiah* run by Iain Fisher: "Unbankable film director Ken Russell seeks lady soulmate. Must be mad about music, movies and Moët & Chandon champagne."[706] This initially reinforced a narrative of personal failure with the tabloid press reported the relationship between Russell's

[702] Rebbeca Hardy, '"I Love Ken — but His Passion Is for Films, Not for Me"', *Daily Mail* (29 July 1991), BFI press clippings; Rebecca Hardy, 'I Danced Naked in Front of Ken but All He Wanted to Do Was Control Me Totally.', *Daily Mail*, (10 February 1996), BFI press clippings; Mary Ridddell, 'Anorexia, Divorce and Why Ken Russell Was so Impossible to Live With', *Daily Mail* (15 June 1999); Natalie Clarke, 'A Husband Who Was Childish, Possessive and Impossible to Live with . . . My Life as Mrs Ken Russell', *Daily Mail* (29 November 2001).

[703] Anon., 'The Love District: Ken Russell on Doctors' Blacklist', *Daily Mail*, 30 December 1986; Geoffrey Levy, 'The Love District: I Know What Goes on and What Comes off When the Rain Falls on Keswick', *Daily Mail*, 1 January 1987; Geoffrey Levy, 'The Love District: The Nuns' Chorus of Disapproval', *Daily Mail*, 3 January 1987; Steve Atkinson, 'Docked! GPs Ban "Obnoxious" Ken', *Daily Mirror*, 30 December 1986.

[704] Deborah Ross, 'The Odd Couple', *Daily Mail*, 11 June 1993, BFI press clippings; Natalie Clarke, 'The Odd Couple', *Daily Mail*, 25 October 2001, BFI press clippings.

[705] David Skan, 'Ken Russell Is Getting Hitched … by His Star!', *Mail on Sunday* (3 June 1984), BFI press clippings; Anon., 'The Psycho Wedding', *Daily Mail* (12 June 1984), BFI press clippings.

[706] Chris Hastings, 'Lonely-Heart Ken Russell Advertises for a Soulmate', *Sunday Telegraph* (19 October 2000), BFI press clippings.

and his fourth wife negatively; representing her as an "obsessed fan" and them as an 'odd couple'.[707] But this was subsequently reframed into a positive narrative of eccentricity in which Russell had found his "soulmate".[708]

### 4.2.3 Reputational Maintenance: Ken Russell's popular reputation and public persona as *enfant terrible* on television

Ken Russell is significant as a filmmaker because of the construction and dissemination of his public persona on British television. During the 1980s and 1990s, Russell increasingly foregrounded his public persona as *enfant terrible* on television to counter reputational decline. Primarily, Russell foregrounded his public persona through the television documentaries and biographies he made for *The South Bank Show* and through media appearances.[709] Here, Russell performed the director on television and further reinforced romantic authorship through reproducing his autobiography. Moreover, Russell increasingly acted either as himself or in character and in doing so, frequently played-up and sent-up his public persona. This reinforced the theme of blurring fact and fiction.

Ken Russell established this aspect of his public persona at the BBC during the 1960s through self-reflexive references to film directing and cameos in the films he made for *Monitor* (BBC Television, 1958-1965) and *Omnibus* (BBC One, 1967-2003). For example, this includes but is not limited to: *The Debussy Film: Impressions of the French Composer* (BBC One, 12 June 1966) in which Vladek Sheybal performs the role of the director; *Don't Shoot the Composer* (BBC One, 9 January 1966), billed as '*Ken Russell's Don't Shoot the Composer*', in which Russell featured as himself directing a documentary about the French film composer Georges

[707] Alison Boshoff and Mark Reynolds, 'Ken Russell does some DIY shopping with his internet love (and he directs of course)', *Daily Mail* (27 November 2000), 3; Nicola Pittman, 'Russell's Love Web', *Daily Mirror* (1 November 2000), 15; Sharon Churcher, 'Ken Russell in bizarre lonely heart love triangle', *Mail on Sunday* (3 December 2000), BFI press clippings.
[708] Ken Russell, 'At Last, I've Found My Soulmate', *Daily Telegraph* (6 December 2000), BFI press clippings; Clarke, 'The Odd Couple'.
[709] From the late 1970s, Russell becomes a featured contributor in a broad range of factual television and radio programmes about filmmaking and cinema. For example: *The Elstree Story* (BBC1, 10/10/1976) a documentary about the British film studio; *In at the Deep End* (BBC1, 10/02/1987; BBC1, 27/07/1988) an episode of the early reality television series where Rusell mentored the broadcaster Paul Heiney in music video direction; *The Film Club: Dietrich* (BBC2, 02/01/1988), Russell introduced *The Blue Angel* (Josef von Sternberg, 1930); *Close-up* (BBC2, 06/04/1995), Russell discussed the robot transformation in *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927); Russell appeared on *The Late Show* (BBC2, 1989-1995) several times to discuss contemporary British cinema (BBC2, 05/10/1993; BBC2, 25/01/1995) with his 1993 appearance featured a pre-recorded tongue-in-cheek segment titled: 'Ken Russell presents: The Seven Deadly Sins of British Cinema'.

Delerue; and *Dance of the Seven Veils* in which Russell cameoed as a conductor conducting the *Symphonia Domestica* while Richard Strauss made sexual relations to his wife. By the 1980s, Russell's public persona was known well-enough in British popular culture that he could foreground himself and be recognisable.

Regarding *The South Bank Show*, Ken Russell set a precedent in performing the director in his first biographical profile for the series: *Vaughan Williams: A Symphonic Portrait* (London Weekend Television, 8 April 1984). As a dramatised documentary, *Vaughan Williams* is modelled on *The Debussy Film*. Therefore, as a film-within-a-film: biographical information about Vaughan Williams is integrated within the narrative diegesis because Russell is making a film about the composer with his widow, Ursula Williams. As it is a serious dramatised documentary, Russell's performance is particularly restrained. Russell is a central feature in the critical reception of *Vaughan Williams* which is considered to confirm the long-standing criticism that his television biographies say more about himself than his subject-matter. For example, John Naughton in *The Listener* identified that: "as usual, Mr Russell made a film that was at least as much about himself as it was about its overt subject".[710] Regarding reputational decline, Sean Day-Lewis in *The Daily Telegraph* noted that: "by Russell's exuberant standard this biography is fairly tepid […] [it] ranges from the touching to the embarrassing".[711] While fellow *Daily Telegraph* critic, Richard Last argued that: "no longer an *enfant* and hardly very *terrible*, Russell accorded Vaughan Williams neither the romanticism he lavished on Elgar, nor the iconoclasm he meted to Strauss and Mahler. This one was just plain prosy."[712] Russell returned to this approach and subject-matter with *Classic Widows* (London Weekend Television, 5 February 1995). In *Classic Widows*, Russell examined the reputation management of Susana Walton, Bertha Stevens, Fiona Searle and Xenia Frankel for their deceased husbands, the classical composers: William Walton, Bernard Stevens, Humphrey Searle, and Benjamin Frankel.

Significant examples of Ken Russell both playing-up to and sending-up his public persona as *enfant terrible* on *The South Bank Show* include: *Ken Russell's ABC of British Music* (London

[710] John Naughton, 'Television: *The South Bank Show*, *Vaughan Williams: A Symphonic Portrai*t (LWT)', *The Listener* (12 April 1984).
[711] Sean Day-Lewis, 'Television: Britons in the Running: *The South Bank Show*, *Vaughan Williams: A Symphonic Portrait* (LWT)', *Daily Telegraph* (20 September 1984).
[712] Richard Last, 'In the Disney Mould: *The South Bank Show*, *Vaughan Williams: A Symphonic Portrait (*LWT)', *Daily Telegraph* (10 April 1984).

Weekend Television, 2 April 1988), *Ken Russell: A British Picture, Portrait of an Enfant Terrible* and *The Secret Life of Arnold Bax* (London Weekend Television, 22 November 1992). In *Ken Russell's ABC of British Music*, Russell burlesques his public persona, the music television chart shows and the trivialisation of arts programming. Throughout *Ken Russell's ABC of British Music*, Russell dominates the documentary as host; introducing clips and irreverently commenting on a subject, corresponding to a letter in the alphabet, in a variety of costumes and locations. Here, Russell always presents as 'himself' but is dressed appropriately – for example, a butler, nun and a Hell's Angel – to correspond with the subject-matter and in line with the commentary. Despite this irreverence, Russell engages with the romantic conceptualisation of the artist throughout. For example, Russell praises the composers Sir Edward Elgar and Frederick Delius but also composers he considers neglected. This includes but is not limited to: Sir Arnold Bax, Frank Bridge, Geroge Butterworth and Havergal Brian. Furthermore, Russell expresses his disdain for the cultural and critical establishment throughout.

The critical reception of *Ken Russell's ABC of British Music* understood Ken Russell's intention but considered the documentary of poor quality and representative of diminishing talent and reputational decline. For example, Peter Lennon in *The Listener* argued that *Ken Russell's ABC of British Music* was wearisome: "jocularly aping the delivery and vocabulary of *Top of the Pops* [BBC One, 1964-2005], he got trapped in this banality himself and could not produce the extra element necessary to transforming it into satire."[713] And in *The Times*, Peter Waymark argued that he: "would trade the lot for Russell's pre-video black-and-white portrait of Elgar made all those years ago for Huw Wheldon's *Monitor*."[714]

As a filmmaker who largely specialised in biography, *Ken Russell: A British Picture, Portrait of an Enfant Terrible* is significant because it is Ken Russell's adaptation of his own autobiography.[715] Regarding autobiographical self-discourse, it is important to note here that Russell's seriousness depended on context. For example, Russell discussed his biography seriously on *Desert Island Discs* (BBC Radio 4, 27 February 1987) and *In the Psychiatrist's Chair* (BBC Radio 4, 10 August 1988) and acknowledged that his public persona was a

[713] Peter Lennon, 'Television: *The South Bank Show, Ken Russell's ABC of British Music (*LWT)', *The Listener* (7 April 1988).
[714] Peter Waymark, 'Television: *The South Bank Show, Ken Russell's ABC of British Musi*c (LWT)', *The Times* (2 April 1988).
[715] Following this, *A British Picture* was serialised into six-parts for BBC Radio 4's 'Book at Bedtime' in June 1992. This was a month of after the transmission of *The Mystery of Dr Martinu* (BBC Two, 16 May 1992).

performance which he had developed for publicity and as a defence mechanism for shyness. Regarding *A British Picture*, Russell burlesques his own approach and style of television biography. For example, Russell adopts a playful home video approach to *mise-en-scène* and a Freudian approach to representation; with Russell providing voice-over narration and as a pun on *enfant terrible*, his infant son Rupert playing Russell in a multi-coloured clown wig. Furthermore, *A British Picture* is consistent with Russell's other autobiographical self-discourse that reinforces the romantic conceptualisation of the artist through positioning himself as a misunderstood outsider. Regarding critical reception, Richard Last in the *Daily Telegraph* argued that *A British Picture* was "mostly fun" because it "revealed an endearing gift for self-parody" but as a "mercurial talent", "what emerged yet again, unfortunately, was his inability to tell the inspired (his films on Elgar and Delius) from the ludicrously awful (Tchaikovsky and Liszt)".[716] Russell returned to this autobiographical approach with the meta-dramatised documentary: *The Road to Mandalay* (Television South, 5 September 1991). Here, Russell and his extended family – again, his son Rupert Russell accompanied by his maternal Aunt 'Moo' (Muriel Codd) and Cousin June (Codd) – get lost on the Southampton one-way system and subsequently embark on a car journey through time and memory.

*The Secret Life of Arnold Bax* (London Weekend Television, 22 November 1992) is significant because Ken Russell portrays the British romantic composer, Sir Arnold Bax.[717] From the mid-1980s, Russell occasionally acted in his films and those of others as an opportunity for employment. During this period, examples include but are not limited to: Russell playing the dual-role of the photographer, 'Kenneth / A Cappadocian' in *Salome's Last Dance*; Russell playing the aforementioned, 'Sir Malcolm Reid' in *Lady Chatterley*; and Russell playing 'Walter', a flamboyant intelligence officer, in the spy-thriller *Russia House* (Fred Schepsi, 1990). A serious but self-reflexive performance, *The Secret Life of Arnold Bax* references the narrative and themes of *The Blue Angel* (Josef von Sternberg, 1930) and reinforces Russell self-romanticisation through an identification with the romantic composer. In *The Secret Life of Arnold Bax*, Russell is arguably playing himself and portrays Bax as a contradictory and misunderstood individual; shunned by the establishment, despite being Master of the King's Musick, because of his disreputable personal life. Additionally, *The Secret Life of Arnold Bax*

[716] Richard Last, 'Television: Cracking the Puzzle: *The South Bank Show, A British Picture* (ITV)', *The Daily Telegraph* (16 October 1989).

[717] Not widely known but Russell had a long-standing relationship with Arnold Bax. In 1971, Ken Russell Productions financed Lyrita recordings of Bax's Symphony No. 1 and Symphony No. 2 with Myer Fredman conducting the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

reinforces the blurring of fact and fiction in relation to Russell's public persona and private life. Here, the role of 'Annie', the fan-dancer who Bax becomes infatuated with, is played by Russell's soon-to-be third wife, Hetty Baynes.[718]

Ken Russell also performed the director outside of his own television work. For example, the dramatised documentary: *Your Honour, I Object: Guccione V Russell* (BBC Two, 27 November 1987). *Your Honour, I Object* reconstructed the unsuccessful breach of contract trial brought in the United States by financer Bob Guccione, the publisher of the men's magazine *Penthouse* (1965-1999), against Russell regarding disagreements over a script for an abandoned film version of Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*; which Guccione had hired Russell to direct.[719] In summary, Guccione objected to Russell's re-write of the script because he intended the film to be similar to the controversial: *Caligula* (Tinto Brass, 1979). Here, Guccione objected to Russell having instead approached *Moll Flanders* as a burlesque. Furthermore, *Your Honour, I Object* featured the flamboyant lawyer Richard Golub who Russell agreed to direct a music video, for a song called *Dancing for Justice*, in lieu of his fee. In the critical reception of *Your Honour, I Object*, Russell is considered to be relatively ordinary compared to the flamboyant personalities of Guccione and Golub. For example, Philip Purser in the *Daily Mail* concluded that *Your Honour, I Object* was a "weirdly watchable tangle of actuality, fantasy and plain bunkum" which "throughout it all, Ken Russell himself maintained a certain massive dignity, like a stranded sea lion."[720] Furthermore, Christopher Tookey of *The Dail Telegraph* argued that *Your Honour, I Object* was: "a kind of modern *Rake's Progress* — that he [Ken Russell] should have begun it by directing arts documentaries about Delius and ended up illustrating the terrible talents of Richard Golub."[721]

Arguably, Ken Russell's embrace of ironic disavowal in his performance further undermined a serious consideration of himself and his work. Russell frequently played-up and sent-up his public persona as *enfant terrible* as an on-screen participant; particularly, on Channel 4 and

[718] Peter Lewis, 'The public life of a would-be Composer', *The Times* (6 November 1991), BFI press clippings; Nigel Dempster, 'Mail Diary: Ken's Ready to Take His Vows', *Daily Mail* (13 August 1992); Deborah Ross, 'Friday's People: The Odd Couple', *Daily Mail* (11 June 1993), BFI press clippings; Middlehurst, 'Ken Russell: Why I Now Believe in Censorship'.
[719] Andrew Golden, 'Saucy Jan Is Molling It Over', *Sunday Mirror* (21 April 1985); Baz Bamigboye, 'Hot Gossip: Why Ken's no Penthouse pet', *Daily Mail* (21 March 1986), BFI press clippings; Tony Parnell, 'Penthouse Pet', *Daily Mirror* (12 June 1987); Anon., 'Singing all the way to the bank', *Evening Standard* (9 July 1987), BFI press clippings.
[720] Philip Purser, 'Television: *Arena, Your Honour, I Object* (BBC 2)', *Daily Mail* (28 November 1987), BFI press clippings.
[721] Christopher Tookey, 'Inflatable Egos: *Arena*, *Your Honour, I Object* (BBC 2)', *The Sunday Telegraph* (29 November 1987), BFI press clippings.

youth-entertainment programming. Significant examples include Russell's appearance on *The Last Resort with Jonathan Ross* (Channel 4, 1 July 1988), a chat show with an alternative comedy sensibility, and *The Obituary Show* (Channel 4, 17th December 1991), a pseudo-serious televisual assessment of Russell. Russell appeared on *The Last Resort with Jonathan Ross* (Channel 4, 1 July 1988) to promote *Salome's Last Dance*. During his interview, Russell initially plays-up to his public persona *enfant terrible* and self-presents as inebriated 'dirty old man' but this presentation shifts to a send-up. On clapping his hands, Imogen Millais Scott (Salome) appears in costume and peels grapes and fans Russell while they both answer Jonathan Ross's questions. Regarding *The Obituary Show*, Russell undermines seriousness and reinforces the assessment that he is controversial and a divisive filmmaker with a volatile and flamboyant character through his contrasting physical appearance: overweight, white-haired and red-faced, dressed in a fur coat wearing a moustache, blue eye-shadow and red nail polish.[722]

## 4.3 Ken Russell and the Development of Cult Reputation: film fan and critical rehabilitation through cult film reappraisal

The development of Ken Russell's cult reputation in the 1990s was in line with developments in British film culture and film criticism; primarily, the establishment of niche taste communities and the development of cult sensibilities during the 1960s, the shift from traditional film criticism to niche film criticism during the 1970s, the development of cult fandom during the 1980s and the subsequent legitimisation of cult taste and discourse during the 1990s.

In line with British cult film sensibilities, Ken Russell's cult reputation was constructed from his established reputation and public persona as *enfant terrible*. During the 1990s, Russell began to be re-appraised by a new generation of niche film critics who were also fans. From an *auteurist* perspective, these fan-critics romanticised Russell because of his association with: the 'Long Sixties' and permissiveness; controversy and the discourse around film censorship;

[722] Hugh Hebert, 'Television: Inside the universities of uniformity: *Without Walls, The Obituary Show* (Channel 4)', *The Guardian* (18 December 1991), BFI press clippings; John Naughton, 'Television: Stanley and the board: *Without Walls*, The *Obituary Show* (Channel 4)', *The Observer* (22 December 1991), BFI press clippings.

authorial self-indulgence, excess and contrarianism; and negative critical reception. Furthermore, Russell's cult reputation was reinforced by his more recent association with the horror genre and low production values. Contributing factors in the development of Russell's cult reputation also include: the circulation of Russell's films and public persona as *enfant terrible* on British television and home video; the serious re-evaluation of *The Devils* and its re-categorisation as a horror film; and Russell's return to amateur filmmaker and embrace of paracinema at the end of his career.

### 4.3.1. The Development of Niche Film Criticism and the Legitimisation of Cult Film Sensibilities in British Film Culture

As stated in the thesis introduction, the establishment of cult film sensibilities is primarily understood to have begun in the United States with the recirculation and reference to classical Hollywood films on television which promoted ironic reading strategies; particularly, through camp and nostalgia. Subsequently, this was legitimised through film criticism and an alternative to mainstream taste was legitimised through the screening of art, underground and exploitation cinema on American college and the 'midnight movie' circuit.[723]

Considering the national-cultural specificities, Justin Smith has identified that British cult film sensibilities emerged during the 'Long Sixties' with the fragmentation of film exhibition and formation of niche taste-communities.[724] Here, Smith identified a series of historical-cultural factors that contributed to the production of a type of film that was later appropriated and re-categorised as cult film. This includes but is not limited to: cultural permissiveness and the liberalisation of film censorship, which caused controversy; the proliferation of film clubs and repertory cinemas, that fostered alternative to mainstream taste; a concentration of overseas film directors; and an openness toward the avant-garde and experimentation.[725] Furthermore, Smith identified that those films that were later appropriated and re-categorised as cult films

[723] Susan Sontag, 'Notes on Camp', in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Penguin, 2009), 275–92; Robert B. Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema: 1930–1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Harry M. Benshoff, 'Beyond the Valley of the Classical Hollywood Cinema: Rethinking the "Loathsome Film" of 1970', in *The Shifting Definitions of Genre: Essays on Labelling Films, Television Shows and Media*, ed. Geraghty and Jancovich (London: McFarland, 2008).

[724] Justin Smith, *Withnail and Us: Cult Films and Film Cults in British Cinema* (I.B. Tauris, 2010), 87, 214.

[725] Smith, *Withnail and Us*, 42-42; I.Q. Hunter, *British Trash Cinema* (London: BFI Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 214.

share a set of textual features and thematic preoccupations. This includes but is not limited to: generic hybridity, narrative incoherence, and stylistic excess; visual and performance styles that carry a burden meaning in excess of narrative function; a performative mode of irony expressed through camp, pastiche and nostalgia; and themes such as masculinity, adolescent rites-of-passage and sexual permission.[726]

Regarding the development of British cult film sensibilities, Smith further identified that these sensibilities formalised into a distinct taste culture between 1976 and 1996.[727] Primarily, British cult film taste and discourse centred around the construction of cult film fandom in relation to the circulation and curation of genre films on television and home video.[728] A seminal moment in the development of cult film sensibilities into cult film fandom was the introduction of the commercial videocassette recorder in 1978. During the early 1980s, this was structured around the 'Video Nasties' phenomenon: a moral panic over the distribution of uncensored horror films on home video which resulted in the revision of film certification with the Video Recordings Act (1985).[729] Consequently, cult film fandom developed into an oppositional taste culture that primarily valued film horror, whether for pleasure or a serious object of study, as a legitimate genre and concerned itself with issues around film censorship and the politics of taste. Furthermore, British cult film fandom romanticised films that they considered critically maligned and placed value in films with a reputation for being 'banned' and uncut versions of censored films.

In British film culture during the 1980s, the introduction of new media technology and channels of distribution, such as the home video, resulted in the expansion of media commentary and an emphasis on criticism as a consumer guide. Here, the shift from traditional film criticism, represented by the decline of humanism as a critical discourse, to niche film criticism, a softer more interpretative mode of criticism, intersected with the development of cult film sensibilities. Critical revisions were initially seen in established specialist publications – such as, for example, *Monthly Film Bulletin* (1934-1991) and the listing magazine, *Time Out* (1968-

[726] Smith, 35, 42, 225-229, 232.
[727] Smith, 87, 214.
[728] Prior to home video, British cult film sensibilities were developed primarily in repertory cinemas and private-member film clubs in London. For example, cinemas such as the Paris Pullman, Electric Cinema and Scala, and the New Cinema Club. Additionally, cult film sensibilities are present in the critical taste of *Films and Filming*.
[729] Kate Egan, *Trash or Treasure? Censorship and the Changing Meanings of the Video Nasties* (Manchester University Press, 2007); Smith, *Withnail and Us*; Hunter, *British Trash Cinema*.

) –where a younger generation of critics, who were informed by the cultural developments of the 'Long Sixties', began to ironise cultural values through a consideration of nostalgia, camp and 'bad' taste.

Considering the formalisation of cult film sensibilities following the introduction of home video, a new generation of niche film critics emerged during the 1980s who were influenced by youth-culture, particularly the music criticism of *New Musical Express* (*NME*) (1952-) and were informed by the popular cinema of their formative years. Therefore, these critics possessed a more personalised approach to values and taste as fans. Additionally, these critics approached genre from a serious and more *auteurist* perspective.

Following this new generation of niche film critics, a new generation of film scholars who identified as fans emerged during the 1990s.[730] Reinforcing the realism-fantasy binary in established British film revision, the principle behind cult re-evaluation for fan-scholars was to recuperate aspects of British film culture into the legitimate canon that were perceived to be critically marginalised on the grounds of taste.[731] Particularly, films and filmmakers who had received a negative critical reception. Furthermore, cult reputation was established retrospectively on a selective re-interpretation, primarily a romanticisation, of films and filmmakers associated with the cultural permissiveness of the 'Long Sixties' and British film culture of the 1970s. Primarily, *auteur*-genre films and youth-orientated films made between 1969 and 1979; which themselves were associated with the topicality of permissiveness, controversy and censorship. Particularly, films belonging to the horror, science-fiction and crime genres and a hybrid art cinema that synthesised camp aesthetics and exploitation elements.

[730] Joanne Hollows, 'The Masculinity of Cult', in *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste*, ed. Mark Jancovich et al. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 48-49; Jacinda Read, 'The Cult of Masculinity: From Fan-Boys to Academic Bad-Boys', in *Defining Cult Movies; The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 66.

[731] Due to being culturally once removed, the United States has historically been more receptive to rehabilitating British films and filmmakers through cult cinema. Alongside *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman, 1975) and *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (Terry Gilliam, Terry Jones, 1975), this has included: films associated with 'Swinging London' such as *Hard Day's Night* (Richard Lester, 1964) *Bedazzled* (Stanley Donen, 1967) and *Deep End* (Jerzy Skolimowski, 1970); folk horror such as *Blood on Satan's Claw* (Piers Haggard, 1971) and *The Wicker Man*; science fiction such as *A Clockwork Orange*, *Zardoz* (John Boorman, 1974) and *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (Nicolas Roeg, 1976). And through cult reception and fandom, the US has also been central to rehabilitation of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger.

Central to the legitimisation of cult film sensibilities in Britain has been the construction of the British cult film canon and its partial incorporation into the legitimate British film canon. Regarding the construction of a British cult film canon, the selection process accords to Ernest Mathijs model of cult reputation.[732] This model proposes the cult reputation of a film increases when it invites comparison in contemporary culture to the topicality of a film's production and reception circumstances to controversy.[733]

Regarding the construction of the British cult film canon and the topicality of controversy, this includes debates about cultural permissiveness and censorship during the 'Long Sixties'. Primarily, controversies over the liberalisation of film censorship at the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC), and an increase in graphic adult material and the representation of sexual violence. Furthermore, film censorship becomes an increasingly central discourse in British film culture during the 1990s. Particularly, in the context of post-video nasties and a contemporary concern for extreme cinema and media violence. Films from the 'Long Sixties' that were re-categorised as cult and were subsequently incorporated into the legitimate British film canon include: *A Clockwork Orange* (Stanley Kubrick, 1971), *Straw Dogs* (Sam Peckinpah, 1971) and *The Wicker Man* (Robin Hardy, 1973). Additionally, Ken Russell's *The Devils* and *Tommy*[734] were both incorporated into the British cult film canon.[735]

Alongside home video, television held a central role in the legitimisation of cult film in Britain. Particularly, Channel 4 and BBC Two programming cult films.[736] For example, the late-night series: *Moviedrome* (BBC Two, 1988-1994, 1997-2000). *Moviedrome* specialised in screening a range of films that could be categorised as cult; including international art cinema. Regarding legitimisation through contextualisation, each film was introduced by the cult British filmmaker Alex Cox, in its initial run before its hiatus, and later the film critic Mark Cousins.

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[732] Ernest Mathijs, 'The Making of a Cult Reputation: Topicality and Controversy in the Critical Reception of *Shivers*', in *Defining Cult Movies; The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).
[733] Mathijs, 122.
[734] *Tommy*, an adaptation of The Who's rock opera, was Russell's most internationally successful film. British film critics considered *Tommy* a departure from classical music for Russell. Despite what was considered lack of dramatic depth, critics considered Russell to have found a subject vulgar enough to match his excessive style. Furthermore, *Tommy* is considered a cult film because of its association with British youth culture and music.
[735] Smith, *Withnail and Us*; Hunter, *British Trash Cinema*.
[736] Cult film programming is separate to television series that develop a cult fandom or intended for that potential audience. For example, British television series associated with the 'Swinging Sixties', such as *The Avengers* (ITV, 1961-1969; Channel 4, 1982-1985) and *The Prisoner* (ITV, 1967-1968; Channel 4, 1983-1984), which developed cult statuses following their repeat transmissions during the 1980s, or American television series like *Twin Peaks* (ABC, 1990-1991) which was programmed as an "off-beat" drama and developed a cult fandom among students.

Moreover, television legitimised cult film through dedicated seasons of programming. Particularly, dedicated seasons about film censorship and extreme cinema. During the 1990s, this included: Channel 4's 'Banned' season (April 1991), BBC Two's 'Forbidden Weekend' (27-29 May 1995), BBC Two's 'Forbidden' season (January-March 1997) and Channel 4's season 'Censored Weekend' (21-22 February 1997). Regarding legitimisation, films that were screened as part of these seasons were either introduced or were accompanied by a dedicated documentary. Furthermore, Ken Russell began to be associated with this type of programming during Channel Four's 'Banned' season. Here, Russell featured in the documentary *Sex & The Censors* (Channel Four, 21 April 1991) where he discussed the BBFC censorship of his film: *Crimes of Passion*.

### 4.3.2 The Development and Construction of Ken Russell's cult reputation

Regarding the politics of taste, Ken Russell was easier to recuperate in Britain through cult film sensibilities during the 1990s. Prior to this, Barry Keith Grant identified that Russell was not initially recuperated through British Film Revisionism during the 1980s on the grounds of taste. Principally, Russell was considered unsuitable for recuperation because he was a working filmmaker who could not be taken seriously because of his declining reputation. Furthermore, the binary oppositions required for critical revisionism could not be straightforwardly delineated in relation to Russell because he synthesised practices, modes and stylistic regimes within his work; such as, for example, realism and fantasy, documentary and drama, and television and film.[737]

The development of Ken Russell's cult reputation in Britain during the 1990s was informed by Russell's established reputation as a 'cult auteur' in North America.[738] In North America, Ken Russell's reputational construction coincided with the legitimisation of cult film sensibilities; seen in the 'midnight movie' phenomenon popularised in urban centres and college campuses. Here, Russell was framed as 'The *enfant terrible* of British Cinema'. However, this was largely removed from an understanding of Russell's artistic reputation as a television director and the

[737] Grant, The Body Politic', 183.

[738] Arguably, Ken Hanke's monograph *Ken Russell's Films* (1984) influenced the construction of Russell's North American reputation. As a film critic, Hanke wrote from a cult perspective. In *Ken Russell's Films*, Hanke applied an *auteurist* framework to Russell and foregrounded intertextuality in the close-textual analysis of his films.

contemporary intermedial circulation of his public persona. In North America, Russell was initially associated with 'Swinging London' and European art cinema because of *Women in Love*. Following *Women in Love*, Russell was associated in North America with religious controversy and the horror genre because of *The Devils*, which itself was re-edited for American audiences, and the British rock band The Who because of *Tommy*.[739] Specifically in the United States, Russell was increasingly associated with cult film following *Altered States*. Regarding *Altered States*, this was in relation to the science-fiction and horror genres, experimentation with sensory deprivation and psychoactive drugs, and body horror and hallucinatory imagery. Furthermore, *The Devils* association with religious controversy and the horror genre in the United States was reinforced as the film was re-edited and re-released with *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973) at the close of the decade.[740] Subsequently, the US-R version of *The Devils* became the one that circulated internationally on home video from 1981 to 1997. Moreover, Russell was increasingly categorised as a cult filmmaker with the relative success of the films he made for New World Pictures, Vestron Pictures and Trimark Pictures on home video; especially *Crimes of Passion* and *The Lair of the White Worm*.

It is important to reiterate here that the construction of Ken Russell's British cult reputation was constructed through selective interpretation. Firstly, in relation to the 'Long Sixties' with a focus on cultural permissiveness and controversies concerning film censorship. And secondly, in relation to his popular reputation and public persona as *enfant terrible* and his association with authorial self-indulgence and excess, controversy and negative critical reception, and bad taste. And here, Russell was romanticised as an unjustly maligned filmmaker. Furthermore, Russell's cult reputation was reinforced by his more recent association with the horror genre and low production values.

Furthermore, the circulation of Ken Russell's films on British television and home video during the 1980s and 1990s is central to the development of his British cult reputation.[741] Here, it is important to note that Russell's films began to be re-categorised as cult films in line with their

[739] Before the success of *Crimes of Passions* on home video, only *Women in Love* and *Tommy* were critical-commercial successes in the US. *Altered States* had some success as a cult film.

[740] The US critical reception of *The Devils* in New York is comparable to its British counterpart because of the shared principles of Anglo-American literary criticism. Though more puritanical and hyperbolic in their response and without a full understanding of Russell's artistic reputation, American critics concluded that *The Devils* was a simpleminded hysterical film; whose exhibitionism was at the expense of both dramatic cohesion and humanity.

[741] As will have been noted, terrestrial television screenings of Russell's films and their repeat screenings have been included within the footnotes where necessary.

re-circulation in the domestic sphere. For example, Russell's *The Music Lovers* (BBC Two, 28 July 1991) and *Gothic* (BBC Two, 11 July 1993) were screened on television as part of *Moviedrome* and Russell's Vestron films were screened in the late-night 'post-pub' slot on Channel 4.[742]

Moreover, the most significant development regarding the construction of Russell's cult reputation during the 1990s was the re-circulation of *The Devils* which prompted its re-evaluation. Here, the British X-certificate version of *The Devils* was screened as part of BBC Two's 'Forbidden Weekend' (29 May 1995) and was subsequently released on Warner Home Video as part of their 'Maverick Directors Collection' in 1997.[743] Furthermore, the screening of *The Devils* as part of the 'Forbidden Weekend' contributed to the legitimisation of the film. Here, the screening was contextualised by a two-part documentary *Empire of the Censors* (BBC Two, 28-29 May 1995) and separate introductions by Alex Cox and Director of the BBFC, James Ferman.[744]

### 4.3.3 The Development of Ken Russell's Cult Reputation: the cult reputation of *The Devils* and its re-categorisation as a horror film

The re-evaluation of *The Devils* has been central to the construction and development of Ken Russell's cult reputation. Specifically, this re-evaluation has centred around the re-categorisation of *The Devils* as a horror film, the re-positioning of *The Devils* within Russell's oeuvre as his 'masterpiece', and the restoration of a director's cut of *The Devils*. As part of this re-evaluation process, *The Devils* has shifted from its initial understanding as a literary adaptation and historical drama and is largely re-interpretated as a horror film; either framed as an 'art-horror' film, with serious political and religious themes, or as a 'cult-horror' film

[742] For example, *The Lair of the White Worm* (22/05/1992; 17/06/1995; 08/11/1996), *Whore* (10/06/1995; 11/05/2002) and *Salome's Last Dance* (10/03/1996) were screened on Channel 4 during this late-night slot. During this period, *The Boy Friend*, *Tommy*, *Valentino*, *Altered States* and *The Rainbow* were also screened on Channel 4 but outside of this late-night slot.

[743] Warner Home Video was the foremost distributer of Russell's films on VHS in the UK. For example, Warner Home Video released: the US-cut of *The Devils* (1982, 1990); *Altered States* (1983, 1989, 1996); *Billion Dollar Brain* (1985); *Lisztomania* and *Valentino* (1987); *Women in Love* (1988, 1990); and *The Music Lovers* (1990). Additionally, Virgin Vision (*Crimes of Passion*, *Gothic* and Aria), Vestron International (*Salome's Last Dance*, *Lair of the White Worm* and *The Rainbow*), 4 Front (*Tommy* and *Gothic*) and MGM/UA (*The Boy Friend*) were also instrumental in releasing Russell's films.

[744] As stated later, British theatrical release of *The Devils* premiered on British terrestrial television as part of the 'Forbidden Weekend' (BBC2, 29/05/1995) and has been repeated thereafter: Channel 5, 26/02/2000; 'Hell on Earth': Channel 4, 05/11/2002; 'Ken Russell Season': More4, 30/06/2007. Furthermore, *The Devils* was transmitted on a variety of Sky Cinema channels between 2002-2004 and 2015-2016.

whose exploitation elements anticipates both the 'nunsploitation' sub-genre and later extreme cinema.[745] And regarding reputational development, Russell's artistic reputation associated with romantic television biographies of classical composers became de-emphasised with the cult re-evaluation of *The Devils*.

In British film culture, the cult re-evaluation of *The Devils* is selective in its re-interpretation of the film. Primarily, the re-evaluation of *The Devils* is in line with British cult film sensibilities and its value in horror and concern for film censorship. Furthermore, this re-evaluation is structured through Ken Russell's popular reputation as *enfant terrible* and his association with authorial self-indulgence and excess, controversy and negative critical reception, and bad taste. Specifically, the cult re-evaluation of *The Devils* centres around the topicality of film censorship and related controversies in contemporary cultural discourse. Firstly, the discourse around cultural permissiveness and film censorship during the production and reception of *The Devils* at the beginning of the 1970s. And secondly, debates about media violence and film censorship at the moment of *The Devils* re-evaluation during the mid-1990s. Representative of this moment was the controversy that surrounded the film *Crash* (David Cronenberg, 1996). Additionally, censorship in cultural discourse was reinforced during the 1990s through television programming dedicated to 'forbidden' and 'banned' content.

In accordance with cult re-evaluation, Ken Russell is romanticised as an unjustly maligned filmmaker and *The Devils* is romanticised as a 'banned' film that was censored and critically condemned on the grounds of blasphemy. Therefore, a generalised narrative around the censorship history of *The Devils* that emphasises controversy is foregrounded. This narrative around the censorship history of *The Devils* concerns but is not limited to: the initial censorship of *The Devils* by the BBFC, the banning of the film by local councils and subsequent corporate censorship by Warner Bros.;[746] the graphic material cut from the film prior to its theatrical release, particularly a sequence titled 'The Rape of Christ'; sensationalist newspaper reports, negative critical reception and the anti-permissive backlash toward *The Devils* by moral campaign groups, such as the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association and the

[745] Joan Hawkins defined 'art-horror' as largely international films that cannot fit into established industrial and critical definitions and are therefore received as both genre films and art cinema (2000).

[746] On examination of the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) files about *The Devils*, it becomes apparent that the support both Rusell and the film received from John Trevelyan and David Ormsby-Gore, Lord Harlech, is generally omitted from the censorship narrative in cult discourse. Regarding censorship, Harlech's support of Russell at the BBFC extended to *Crimes of Passion* and ended with his death in 1985.

Nationwide Festival of Light;[747] and the horror and transgressive elements of *The Devils*. For reference, the removal of graphic material prior to BBFC certification primarily concerns a sequence titled 'The Rape of Christ' and corporate censorship refers to the circulation of re-edited versions of *The Devils* on home video and the suppression of a restored director's cut of the film. Additionally, *Dance of the Seven Veils* (BBC One, 15 February 1970), which has been out of circulation since its original transmission, is incorporated into this narrative but in name only to reinforce *The Devils* own reputation as a 'banned' film.

The restoration of a director's cut of *The Devils* has also been central to the construction and development of Ken Russell's cult reputation. Selected from the narrative around the censorship history of *The Devils*, this primarily concerns the alternate edited versions of the film in circulation and the restoration, or more precisely reconstruction, of filmed material cut from the film prior its theatrical release into an official director's cut. The proposal for the restoration of an official director's cut was first established in the American professional fanzine: *Video Watchdog* (1990-2017). Particularly, the publication's editor Tim Lucas's article 'Cutting the Hell Out of *The Devils'*, and film critic and broadcaster Mark Kermode's interview: 'The Devil Himself: Ken Russell'.[748] In 'Cutting the Hell Out of *The Devils'*, Lucas fixes the discourse around the censorship history of *The Devils* through offering a detailed examination of the material that had been cut from the film and the different alternate edited versions of the film in circulation.[749] Here, the 'The Rape of Christ' sequence, in which the nuns defile the rood cross of Loudon Cathedral during an exorcism, is centralised in the discourse around the restoration of a director's cut. Furthermore, *Video Watchdog* as a publication is central to the dissemination of Ken Russell as a 'cult *auteur*' and *The Devils* as a controversial film on the grounds of blasphemy.

It is important to note that Ken Russell's North American and British reputations become increasingly conflated during the development of his cult reputation. Regarding the cult romanticisation of *The Devils*, it can be argued that it is selective as it generalises the historical

[747] For example, repeating without reference to contemporary press reports (for example, Birkett, Gladstone Smith, 10 January, 1971: 3) about the sexual assault of female extras performing as nuns during the filming of 'The Rape of Christ' sequence at Pinewood Studios.
[748] Tim Lucas, 'Cutting the Hell Out of *The Devils*', *Video Watchdog* (September 1996), 37-51; Mark Kermode, 'The Devil Himself: Ken Russell', *Video Watchdog* (September 1996), 52-56.
[749] Tim Lucas, 'Cutting the Hell Out of *The Devils*', *Video Watchdog* (September 1996), 37-51; Mark Kermode, 'The Devil Himself: Ken Russell', *Video Watchdog* (September 1996), 52-56.

cultural contexts around the film to reinforce a narrative that the film has been marginalised. For example, the cult re-evaluation of *The Devils* omits that it belonged to the commercial mainstream of British cinema during the early-1970s and was itself a box-office success. Moreover, the cult re-evaluation of *The Devils* does not concern itself with the prescribed taste, standards and values of traditional criticism and instead, generalises the film's negative critical reception.[750] Primarily, either referring only to Alexander Walker's negative review of *The Devils* for the *Evening Standard* or referring to reviews of American 'film critics-as-stars' such as: Pauline Kael, Judith Christ and Roger Ebert. It is important to note here a contradiction in foregrounding the press sensationalism that fuelled the anti-permissive backlash toward *The Devils*. Here, the adoption of the same emotive language used to criticise the film reproduces, rather than interrogates, conservative discourses. Particularly, mythologising the accusations of obscenity and blasphemy made against the film. Furthermore, aspects of *The Devils* historical reception in Britain are somewhat obscured by the film's cult reputation.

The film critic and broadcaster Mark Kermode is closely associated with Ken Russell in British film culture. Firstly, Kermode is instrumental in the legitimisation of cult taste and discourse in mainstream British film criticism and the dissemination of Ken Russell's cult reputation in Britain.[751] This is represented in Kermode's career trajectory: from listing and youth entertainments magazines and the reception of home videos to traditional publications and reception of mainstream theatrical releases.[752] And secondly, Kermode is central to the re-evaluation of *The Devils* and the restoration of a director's cut. Their personal friendship aside, it is important to note here that the above can be characterised as a process of mutual critical legitimisation between Kermode and Russell.

As stated, Mark Kermode's association with Ken Russell began with the *Video Watchdog* interview: 'Ken Russell: The Devil himself'.[753] This interview is significant as it established a

[750] As stated in Chapter Two, the initial critical reception of *The Devils* considered it to be a failure from a humanist perspective as it neither conformed to the critical standards of literary adaptation nor the critical conventions of historical drama. Specifically, Russell's approach and style was considered too self-indulgent, excessive and trivial for a film adaptation of John Whiting's play and for serious historical reconstruction.

[751] Regarding Russell's films, Mark Kermode is primarily an advocate for those which are in line with cult film sensibilities. Arguably, Kermode has had a singular focus on *The Devils* and to a lesser extent, *Tommy*.

[752] Kermode has outlined his critical approach and taste, specifically a university-educated literary approach combined with cult taste, and throughout his criticism foregrounds his serious concern for the horror genre – particularly, from a socialist and Catholic perspective – and the censorship of horror films (Kermode, 2001: 126-134; Kermode, 2002: 10-22).

[753] Tim Lucas, 'Cutting the Hell Out of *The Devils*', *Video Watchdog* (September 1996), 37-51; Mark Kermode, 'The Devil Himself: Ken Russell', *Video Watchdog* (September 1996), 52-56.

set of discourses about Russell which Kermode subsequently circulated in a number of articles which framed future interviews with Russell in the media.[754] Here, cult discourse and language influenced how Russell is perceived. Primarily, Kermode approaches Russell from an *auteurist* position as an example of artistic genius that incorporates flamboyance and eccentricity. Furthermore, Kermode considers Russell to have been persecuted by film critics. Regarding *The Devils*, Kermode re-evaluates *The Devils* as Russell's 'masterpiece': an art-horror film with universal religious and political themes.[755] In line with cut sensibilities and his own formative years, Kermode also foregrounds: the film's censorship narrative; the anti-permissive backlash and controversy that surrounded the film on its theatrical release; the film's Catholicism and the themes of the sacred and the profane, and transgression and transcendence. As stated, Kermode re-interprets *The Devils* as a profoundly Catholic film and this, inflected with cult film sensibilities, is reflected in the language he uses to describe the film. For example, "for the moment, though, Russell's beautiful monster must remain where it has always been, caged within the confines of state and studio, cast out of the Catholic canon of mainstream cinema."[756]

As stated, a central feature in the cult re-evaluation of *The Devils* is a concern for a restoration of an official director's cut. And it is important to note here, that Mark Kermode is central to the narrative around the restoration of a director's cut of *The Devils*.[757] The cumulative reputational moment that comprised of the restoration and premiere of the director's cut of *The Devils* at the British Film Institute's National Film Theatre and the screening of the documentary *Hell on Earth: The Desecration and Resurrection of The Devils* (Channel 4, 25 November 2002) –followed that same evening with a screening of the British X-certificate version of *The Devils* – represents the legitimisation of Ken Russell's reputation as a cult filmmaker and the reputation of *The Devils* as a cult film.

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[754] Mark Kermode, 'The Ways and Whims of a Horny Old Devil', *Independent on Sunday* (19 November 2000), 10, BFI press clippings; Mark Kermode, 'Raising Hell', *Sight & Sound* (12: 12) (2002), 28–31, BFI press clippings; Mark Kermode and Linda Ruth Williams, 'Mythomania: Ken Russell 1927-2011', *Sight & Sound* (22: 2) (2012), 22–24; Mark Kermode and Ken Russell, 'The Return of My Masterpiece', *The Times, Times 2* (12 March 2012), 10.

[755] *The Devils* as an art-horror film is examined in Joan Hawkin's contributing chapter to *A Companion to the Horror Film*: '"Moody Three": Revisiting Ken Russell's *The Devils*' (2014: 501-518).

[756] Mark Kermode, 'Raising Hell', *Sight & Sound* (12:12) (2002): 31, BFI press clippings.

[757] As stated throughout the thesis, the specifics of the censorship history of *The Devils* will not be recounted in this PhD. This is on the grounds that it has been extensively examined as a single case study and the censorship narrative, including that around the restoration of the director's cut, is frequently repeated. Most recently, in the marketing and commentary around Warner Bros. Clockwork international release of *Ken Russell's The Devils* in 2026.

*Hell on Earth: The Desecration and Resurrection of The Devils* was directed by Paul Joyce and written and presented by Mark Kermode. Principally, *Hell on Earth* fixes both Kermode's public association with Ken Russell and *The Devils*, and the discourses around the film.[758] Particularly, Kermode's centrality in the narrative around the restoration of a director's cut of *The Devils*.[759] Regarding the cult legitimisation of discourses around *The Devils*, *Hell on Earth* positions *The Devils* as a controversial film about political, sexual and religious corruption. This position is framed by the disclaimer, "Strictly for adults only: it contains very strong language, scenes of an explicit sexual nature and scenes which may offend the religious sensibilities of some viewers', and the introduction which describes the film as "condemned by critics, picketed by religious protest groups and cut by censors" because it was "too controversial for public consumption". Accordingly, the documentary focuses primarily on the censorship narrative of the film. Principally, the production and censorship history around 'The Rape of Christ' sequence, framed as a production scandal, and its reconstruction. This framing of *The Devils* is supported and reinforced throughout *Hell on Earth* through interviews and personal testimonies with individuals whose reputations are associated with the film, this includes: Russell; cast members such as Vanessa Redgrave and Dudley Sutton; producer Roy Baird, composer Peter Maxwell Davies and editor Michael Bradsell; BBFC examiner Ken Perry; film critic Alexander Walker; and BBFC consultant to *The Devils* and Russell scholar, Gene D. Phillips.

### 4.3.4 Reputational Decline and Reinforcing Cult Reputation: Ken Russell's return to amateur filmmaking

As a result of the negative reputational impact of Ken Russell's later films, Russell turned to digital filmmaking, online distribution and lowbrow aesthetics as an alternative to the mainstream. Contradictorily, this reinforced both the narrative around professional failure and Russell's cult reputation. As outlined in the conclusion of the first section of this chapter, Russell was no longer viable in the increasingly middlebrow and international British cinema

[758] Kermode had previously written and presented documentaries about the cult films: *The Fear of God: 25 Years of the Exorcist* (BBC Two, 13 June 1998), *Still Tickin': The Return of A Clockwork Orange* (Channel 4, 18 March 2000), *Burnt Offering: The Cult of the Wicker Man* (Channel 4, 29 December 2001). *Hell on Earth* was followed by *Mantrap: Straw Dogs: The Final Cut* (Channel 4, 9 August 2003).

[759] It is not fault of Kermode's, but the role of archivist Mike Arrick and Paul Joyce has been minimised in the cult discourse around the restoration of *The Devils*.

of the 1990s. Therefore, Russell adapted to the precarity of employment opportunities by returning to amateur practice with digital filmmaking, collaborating with family and friends, and pursing self-distribution online.

These 'Gorsewood Productions', or 'Garagiste' films challenge cultural distinctions and taste through blurring cultural boundaries and ironic self-commentary. They were anticipated by Ken Russell's adoption of video technology at *The South Bank Show* and the visual aesthetics of *Salome's Last Dance*. Here, Russell's burlesque approach and style was suited for paracinema.[760] Films included: *The Lion's Mouth* (Ken Russell, 2000), a film biography of Harold Davidson, the Rector of Stiffkey, which utilised the narrative structure of *Citizen Kane*; *The Fall of the Louse of Usher: A Gothic Tale for the 21st Century* (Ken Russell, 2002), Russell's interpretation of Edgar Allan Poe. *The Fall of the Louse of Usher* was Russell's final commercial released feature-film, and it received a negative critical reception. In *Sight & Sound*, Geoffrey Mcnab concluded that the film was "self-indulgent digital effort […] akin to a grotesque home movie" that "surely marks a new low".[761]

As stated, the discourse around Ken Russell's return to amateur filmmaking reinforced a narrative around professional failure. Russell is both represented and positions himself as a misunderstood and neglected outsider.[762] However, this is modified as Russell acknowledges that he has acquired a reputation for eccentricity. In an interview with Tim Cooper in the *Evening Standard*, Russell states reluctantly: "I've got this reputation for being an eccentric, people think I'm peculiar."[763] Furthermore, Russell is less contrarian and appears positive about his circumstances and prospects: "I want to prove that I am not dead and buried. This is a learning thing for me, but I'd rather make my own personal films from now on, so long as I can afford it".[764]

[760] Jeffrey Sconce, 'Trashing the academy: taste, excess, and an emerging politics of cinematic style', *Screen* (36: 4) (December 1995), 371–393

[761] Geoffrey Mcnab, '*The Fall of the Louse of Usher'*, *Sight & Sound* (13: 2) (2003): 64.

[762] Richard Brooks, 'Ken Russell Left to Make Home Movies in Garage', *The Sunday Times*, 4 February 2001, BFI press clippings; Jaqueline Maley, 'Future of Film Is on the Net, Claims Ken Russell', *The Guardian*, January 2006, BFI press clippings; Matthew Sweet, 'Lights, Lawnmower, Camcorder, Action', *Independent on Sunday*, October 2000, BFI press clippings.

[763] Tim Cooper, 'Ken Russell and the Defrocked Padre'', *Evening Standard*, 10 July 2000, BFI press clippings.

[764] Cooper, 'Ken Russell and the Defrocked Padre''.

Regarding Ken Russell's public persona on television, Russell's profiled on the *The South Bank Show: Ken Russell* (London Weekend Television, 11 February 2001). This profile was filmed during the production of *The Fall of the Louse of Usher* and consists of an overview of Russell's career and concerns his current return to amateur filmmaking. Regarding romantic self-discourse, a theme is Russell's self-deprecation in discussing his declining reputation from the early 1970s onwards and his return to amateur filmmaking which provides him the creative freedom he once enjoyed at the BBC. However, Russell still incorporates contrarian self-presentation. For example, behind-the-scenes footage from the production of *Fall of the Louse of Usher* shows Russell blowing-up a sex doll and his interview being "interrupted" by the actor Marie Findley (Nurse ABC Smith) who wishes costume approval from Russell for her PVC nurses outfit.

Regarding the latter, this anticipates moments of late contrarianism from Ken Russell. For example, the televised moment in which he heckled Matt Lucas and David Walliams, creators of comedy show *Little Britain* (BBC Three and BBC One, 2003-2006), at *The South Bank Show Awards* (ITV, 27 January 2005) and his short tenure as a housemate on *Celebrity Big Brother* (Channel 4, 2007); the latter prompting a level of renewed public interest in Russell prior to his death on 27th November, 2011.

## 4.4. Conclusion

This chapter has examined Ken Russell's late career from the mid-1980s to the early 2000s in relation to reputational decline. Primarily, this chapter has examined the negative reputational impact of Russell's return to British cinema in the mid-1980s and the BBC in the early 1990s, Russell's attempt to maintain his reputation through a performance of his authorial persona as an *enfant terrible*, and the development of Russell's cult reputation during the 1990s.

Throughout this chapter, it has been demonstrated that critical reception is central to the development of Russell's authorial reputation. And in relation to the development of British film culture and film criticism, criticisms central role in both the decline and rehabilitation of Russell's authorial reputation. Furthermore, this chapter has demonstrated that authorial self-

presentation through the media is also central to the development of authorial reputation. Particularly, as it also informs criticism.

Regarding the relationship between criticism and reputational decline, this chapter has examined the negative reputational impact of Russell's return to British cinema and television in the 1980s. Specifically, the cumulative effect of negative critical reception. Regarding Russell and his return to D. H. Lawrence as source material, it was the failure to meet critical expectations related to Russell's artistic and popular reputations, alongside contemporary critical expectations in relation to genre, that contributed to his final reputational decline.

Regarding reputational maintenance and in response to reputational decline, this chapter has identified that Russell is significant because of the way in which he foregrounded his public persona as an *enfant terrible*. Specifically, on television across a broad range of programming. This includes his own documentaries made for *The South Bank Show*. Furthermore, Russell is significant because of his combination of contrarian self-presentation and romantic self-discourse and his simultaneous playing-up to and sending-up of his own popular reputation and public persona. As a contradictory figure, this included contributing to his own reputational decline through contrarian self-presentation that caused derision and romantic self-discourse that reinforced a narrative of reputational decline.

And regarding reputational rehabilitation, this chapter has examined the relationship between developments in British film culture and film criticism and its effect on reputational development. Specifically, the transition to niche film criticism and the legitimisation of cult film sensibilities and its effect on authorial reputation. Regarding Russell, this is the development of his reputation as cult filmmaker during the 1990s. Particularly, through the re-evaluation of *The Devils* and its legitimisation in the British cult film canon. Arguably, it is this cult reputation that Russell is primarily understood and is accessed through today. However, it is important to note that cult reputation obfuscates a historical understanding of Russell. Particularly, in relation to the cult discourse that surrounds *The Devils.*

## 5 Thesis Conclusion

This thesis is titled ‘Ken Russell: British critical reception and the construction of an authorial reputation’ and has examined the institutional and critical establishment, construction and development of Ken Russell’s authorial reputation as a film and television director.

This thesis has intervened in the historical study of British film and television as a combined authorship and critical reception study. As a historical study, this thesis has demonstrated that developments in British film and television culture, and British film and television criticism, are central to the establishment, construction and development of authorial reputation. Particularly, the shifting boundaries of critical taste, standards, and values and their relationships to the historical-cultural meaning of individual films and their authors.

This thesis has examined this through the construction, development and maintenance of Ken Russell’s authorial reputation. Particularly, in regard to the role of cultural institutions, such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the British Film Institute (BFI), and developments in British film and television criticism. Primarily, in relation to broad cultural developments and themes associated with the ‘Long Sixties’.

This thesis has demonstrated the significance of the construction, development and maintenance of Ken Russell’s authorial reputation and public persona as a British filmmaker. This includes: the institutional and critical construction of Russell’s reputation as an amateur filmmaker of exceptional talent; the institutional and critical construction of Russell’s artistic reputation as the ‘television-director-as-artist’; the construction of a popular reputation as ‘The Wild Man of the BBC’; the development of a public persona to distinguish himself from other television directors crossing-over into commercial cinema; the development of Russell’s popular reputation and the fixing of his public persona as *enfant terrible*; Russell’s authorial maintenance of his popular reputation and public persona to counter reputational decline; and the critical construction and development of Russells cult reputation which has permitted his rehabilitation.

Regarding the above, Ken Russell’s significance as a British filmmaker lies in: that his artistic reputations as an amateur filmmaker and television director were used as part of institutional

strategies for prestige; that critical expectations about Russell were established early in his career which then came to define the rest of his career; that his popular reputation and public persona fixed due to sustained controversy and the cumulative effect of negative critical reception; that Russell developed a recognisable public persona that was circulated within British popular culture; that his flamboyant public persona combined contrarian self-presentation with romantic self-discourse; and that Rusell performed his public persona as a form of reputational maintenance. Furthermore, Russell's reputation and public persona were both foregrounded in and central to critical reception.

Arguably, the most significant reputational development of Ken Russell's career was at the beginning of the 1970s when Russell's popular reputation and public persona overwhelmed his artistic reputation. Specifically, the reputational impact of *Dance of the Seven Veils:* a *comic strip in 7 episodes on the life of Richard Strauss, 1864-1949* (BBC One, 15 February 1970) and *The Devils* (Ken Russell, 1971) resulted in Russell becoming firmly associated with: authorial self-indulgence and excess, the intention to shock and controversy, and negative critical reception for the rest of his career. Here, the *enfant terrible* became his primary reputation and structured critical expectations and assessments for the rest of his career. Furthermore, this reputational development, combined with his flamboyant public persona, undermined serious critical consideration and contributed to reputational decline. Contradictorily, it is also this reputational development that Russell's cult reputation has been constructed from and which has prompted his rehabilitation.

This thesis has also intervened in the historical understanding of Ken Russell. Principally, this thesis has challenged commonly held assumptions around the critical reception of *Dance of the Seven Veils* and *The Devils*. Specifically, the generalisation that they were critically condemned on their initial transmission and theatrical release. Rather, these films were considered to have failed to meet critical expectations in relation to literary adaptation, historical drama and biographical representation. Primarily, the appropriate approach and style for serious subject-matter and theme. Furthermore, these films were considered to not meet the critical expectations associated with Russell's artistic reputation but instead, confirm those associated with his popular reputation. Regarding critical reception, this thesis has also recovered the historical understanding of Russell's biographical and historical approach, or style, as burlesque.

Additionally, this thesis has attempted to recover Ken Russell's public persona as it is no longer in circulation within British popular culture. Therefore, it highlights the importance of archival research. Particularly, in regard to ephemera such as press clippings, and television programmes such as chat shows. Moreover, more historical research needs to be conducted separately in regard to British critical reception and Russell himself. Regarding the latter, one area is the importance of collaboration in his career. Particularly, the role of his first wife, the costume designer Shirley Russell.

And finally, this thesis contributes to, and therefore intervenes, with what will be Ken Russell's centenary in 2027. Here, Russell's centenary will be marked by a two-month retrospective at the BFI South Bank (July-August 2027). Therefore, this provides an appropriate moment in which to discuss and assess both the construction and development of Russell's authorial reputation, and his significance and legacy as a British filmmaker. This event is already notable with Warner Bros. Clockwork international theatrical release of the director's cut of *The Devils*, re-titled *Ken Russell's The Devils*, in October 2026.

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