

**Genre, Taste and the BBC:
The Origins of British Television Science Fiction**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the earliest science fiction dramas on the BBC, broadcast during the period between 1936 and 1955 when the BBC had the monopoly on television within Britain. These dramas were not originally identified as “science fiction”, although their fantastic nature was recognised and provided early television writers and producers the opportunity to engage with social concerns and to experiment with the formal possibilities of the new medium. As the American term “science fiction” became more familiar in Britain after the war, the approaches and responses to these productions changed as the audience responded to the connotations of the genre as well as to the individual programmes, and the BBC had to consider these probable responses with regard to its programming. This coincided with the expansion of the television audience, and the increased possibility of a rival television broadcaster being established.

These factors required close consideration with regard to the way that the BBC handled genre on television if it was to successfully adapt to these changing circumstances. The dangers of making wrong choices with regard to genre were demonstrated by the controversy surrounding *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1954), which connected with concerns over loss of British culture. The benefits of making the right choices regarding genre were shown by the success of *The Quatermass Experiment* (1953). Science fiction production expanded across the BBC, continuing to engage with social concerns, but also helping the BBC to develop a particular identity for its television service based on past successes, as it prepared for the arrival of its competitor.

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Introduction: Genre, Taste and the BBC

Writing in her 2002 study of the development of British television police serials, Susan Sydney-Smith pointed out that “In British television scholarship, there has to date been little written about the ‘beginnings’ of popular generic forms.”¹ The following year, Lez Cooke indicated “a need for books on specific genres” as part of an outline of areas requiring more investigation in the history of television drama.² This study follows up on these calls for further research, not just into specific genres, but more specifically into where the television incarnations of those genres came from and how they developed in a specifically British context. The specific focus for this study is science fiction, and particularly the way in which the presentation of the genre on early British television connects with issues of taste and class that illustrate changes in British society and with how the BBC developed and engaged with a concept of its audience during the period under study.

This specific period is 1936 to 1955, during which the BBC held a monopoly on television broadcasting within Britain. This followed a period of experimental broadcasts, and preceded the introduction of commercial broadcasting. It also represents a period of major shifts in British society, broken early by the Second World War, during which television transmissions ceased, and then increasingly influenced by interaction with American popular culture. It is a period that Arthur Marwick has identified as being represented by a move from social consensus towards a consumer society,³ a move that it is possible to see reflected in the development of British television, where the public service broadcasting ideals of the BBC were altered by the arrival of a commercial competitor.

Defining the Focus: Genre, Television and History

In dealing specifically with the science fiction genre, the problem is faced that, while Britain in this period was very different to the United States, most of the

¹ Sydney-Smith, Susan, *Beyond Dixon of Dock Green: Early British Police Series* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2002) p.2

² Cooke, Lez, *British Television Drama: A History* (London: BFi Publishing, 2003) p.5

³ Marwick, Arthur, *The Pelican Social History of Britain: British Society Since 1945* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982) pp.17-18. Marwick’s period is 1945-1957

criticism and theories surrounding science fiction relate to the American experience, with the rare exception of such specific publications as I.Q.Hunter's edited collection *British Science Fiction Cinema* and John R.Cook and Peter Wright's *British Television Science Fiction: A Hitchhiker's Guide*. Janet Thumim has commented on this issue of the different social experiences, stating that:

While television itself was under construction, so too, in a sense, were the societies - in the USA and the UK - with which it had such a close and reciprocal relation. In Britain this entailed the post-war reconstruction and coming to terms with the loss of colonial power, whereas the post-war, consumption-driven and booming economy of America was intent on maintaining its position as the dominant global economic and political power. In both contexts, as I have suggested, the manufacture of consensus around national identity was a crucial feature of social discourse: pre-war society must be renewed in the brave new post-war world by the acknowledgement of a proud, united, stable and above all an homogenous national community.⁴

More anecdotally, science fiction writer and critic Brian Aldiss remembers the appeal of science fiction in the post-war era as deriving in part from its association with America, but also that the association of America with science fiction reinforced the appeal of the idea of the United States, an idea that contrasted strongly with the lived reality of post-War Britain:

All that I admired in the cinema was American. Then again, the sort of music that moved me most deeply was American, the blues and jazz. The same with all the music we called 'hot' in my adolescence. The best ideas, too, seemed to be American. The States stood then as a bastion of freedom and continued revolution. It was a sad thing to see that image crumble after the war; at the same time, the American view of Britain as a gallant little fighting island was collapsing. Particularly before the second world war, when more and more of Europe seemed to turn into an armed enemy camp, the lights of America burned bright, viewed from English shores.

Then of course there was sf. Not that it ever could be said to paint a cheerful picture of the States; very far from it; but it radiated an image of a land of dynamism and change. This I apprehended as very different from Britain, with its oppressions, unemployment, class structures, and trading difficulties (all of which existed in the States also, as I failed to realize when a lad). I did get the message that the most exciting sf came from New York.⁵

⁴ Thumim, Janet, "Introduction" in Janet Thumim (ed.), *Small Screens, Big Ideas: Television in the 1950s* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2002) p.7

⁵ Aldiss, Brian, "Magic and Bare Boards" in Aldiss, Brian W. and Harry Harrison (eds), *Hell's*

Jeremy Tunstall has similarly commented on America as a land of dreams for Europeans, situating it within “a long tradition of thinking of America in terms of geographical and social mobility, of the United States as the land where the unreal might become real.”⁶ In other words, both Aldiss and Tunstall connect British, and wider European, dreams of social change and ideas of the future to an idea of America stemming from American media products.

However, while the United States may have presented a “land where the unreal might become real”, the great differences in the experience of the war and the post-war period between Britain and the United States meant that the national approaches to science fiction, as with other genres, also had their differences. Britain had coped and was coping with far worse conditions than the US had experienced on the domestic front, as Aldiss’ quote makes clear. Taken in conjunction with the different development of the European tradition of fantastic fiction, this meant that the social concerns reflected in British science fiction were different from those reflected in American expressions of the genre.

Which brings us to the issue of defining “science fiction”. The entry for “Definitions of SF” in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* lists twenty-two definitions.⁷ At the time of writing, the Wikipedia article on the same subject lists thirty definitions.⁸ There is even an issue as to whether science fiction is actually a genre or not. Farah Mendlesohn, for example, claims that “Science fiction is less a genre – a body of writing from which one can expect certain plot elements and specific tropes – than an ongoing discussion.”⁹ This is an extension of the argument that science fiction is actually a mode rather than a genre, a particular way of engaging with ideas and issues rather than a specific type of narrative.

Cartographers: Some Personal Histories of Science Fiction Writers (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1975) p.190

⁶ Tunstall, Jeremy, *The Media Are American* (London: Constable, 1977) p.82

⁷ Nicholls, Peter (eds), *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (London: Granada, 1981) pp.159-161

⁸ Anon., “Definitions of Science Fiction”, *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Definitions_of_science_fiction accessed 9 June 2009

⁹ Mendlesohn, Farah, “Introduction: Reading Science Fiction” in Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) p.1

For the purposes of this thesis, productions have been identified as falling into the science fiction genre because they are either recognised works of science fiction, such as the Quatermass serials, because they adapt recognised science fiction works, such as the 1949 adaptation of H.G.Wells' *The Time Machine*, or because the premise of the drama relies upon tropes identifiable with canonical works of science fiction, as is the case with *No Smoking!* This approach is in line with the view taken by writers such as Norman Spinrad and Christopher Priest, with the latter having claimed that "Science fiction, in the modern sense, has no actual existence except as a publisher's category. The only completely reliable definition of science fiction is that anything labelled as science fiction is science fiction".¹⁰ In other words, science fiction is anything which is called science fiction. At the same time this comes with a sense of there being a canon of works which direct the shape of the genre even if they do not define it. Priest continues with his definition by noting that "science fiction" as a genre label originated with Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing Stories* in 1926 and that the content of the magazine influenced others of the type and from there a community of fans and writers:

All science fiction has grown from there, because the existence of the early pulp-magazines attracted writers who wrote specially for them, imitating each other and influencing each other. This process of imitation continues until the present day, accounting for the unwritten 'rules' of science fiction, the high proportion of mediocre work that appears, the recurrent use of shorthand and jargon ... and perhaps most noticeably of all, the hostility to the outside world that is subliminally manifest in many utterances of science fiction writers.¹¹

Priest sees science fiction as a self-reflexive genre, where much of the genre product is concerned with iterations on existing ideas within the genre, combined with a notion of difference, of somehow being apart from the rest of society.

The issue of basing this definition upon "canonical" science fiction raises the question of who decides the canon. This issue is central to genre studies, in that the identity of genres frequently relies upon a core canon of texts from which the characteristics that are then used to develop a theory of the genre are derived.

¹⁰ Priest, Christopher, "British science fiction" in Patrick Parrinder, *Science Fiction: A critical guide* (London: Longman, 1979) p.187

¹¹ Priest, Christopher, "British science fiction", in Parrinder, *Science Fiction*, p.187

However, by basing the selection of material for this study upon canonical material and logical extrapolations therefrom, this ensures that this study remains close to the recognisable core of science fiction studies and that the issues raised throughout the thesis can then be considered, discussed and applied in relation to other canonical works rather than being applicable only to a select subset of material. The core issues of the thesis have wider applicability than to this thesis alone, and this closeness to the canon of science fiction studies makes it easier to apply them across other material.

The cross-media existence of science fiction during the period 1936 to 1955 also has to be acknowledged, as does the growth of the genre's profile, bringing "an unprecedented kind of cultural prominence for the genre".¹² Science fiction was represented in pulp and "slick" magazines, in comics and novels, in films both low- and high-budget, on radio and on television and in the theatre. But the relationships between these different expressions of the genre shift and develop through the period, particularly with the "sf movie boom centred in the USA" and the growth of the science fiction novel.¹³ Because British television began by relying heavily on adaptations, it drew upon these existing expressions of science fiction. But it also has to be acknowledged that BBC radio and television played their part in adding to the interconnections between media: they adapted stage plays, novels and short stories; radio series and television productions were remade as films; radio productions crossed over to television, and productions from both were novelised or released in script form. However, although there were definite influences and occasions of cross-fertilisation between media in this period with regard to science fiction, it should also be remembered that different media often have different interpretations of a particular genre, with Jason Mittell emphasising that:

the lessons of film genre studies cannot account for many of television's specific practices – television's constant integration of fiction and nonfiction, narrative and nonnarrative, especially confounds the dependence on narrative structure typical of most genre film criticism.¹⁴

¹² Roberts, Adam, *The History of Science Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) p.196

¹³ Bould, Mark, "Film and Television" in James and Mendlesohn (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, p.85

¹⁴ Mittell, Jason, *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture* (London:

But it must also be remembered that this is early British television that is under discussion in this thesis, not later American television, which is the subject of Mittell's work. Many of the key theories surrounding television have developed around American commercial television: Raymond Williams' concept of the broadcast "flow" which both unifies and fragments the individual elements of programmes, advertisements and announcements;¹⁵ John Thornton Caldwell's idea of "televisuality", focussing explicitly on the complexity of the television image in US broadcasts of the late 1980s and early 1990s;¹⁶ John Ellis' notions of television as "a regime of the glance rather than the gaze"¹⁷ is rooted in modern technology and attitudes to television, rather than the dim screens and novelty of the early television service. While these and similar ideas are useful in providing notions of how television can be understood, their specificities are not of immediate relevance to the monopolistic, public service, limited audience situation which forms the background to this thesis. Of key importance, however, is Jason Jacobs' theorising of the development of the broadcast style of early British television, as explored in *The Intimate Screen*. His historical investigation of the "recurrent pattern of modernization" and "the appetite for innovation and change that characterized the practices and thinking of drama producers, directors, and writers",¹⁸ showed that there is much of interest to be uncovered about those early days of television, and that the examination of these roots of our current television system can be revealing about what we view today.

Of special importance to this examination is the centrality of the concept of "liveness" for early television, and particularly the idea that it functioned as a relay, showing the viewer something that was happening now but in another place. Sandy Flitterman-Lewis has noted that:

Routledge, 2004) pp.23-24

¹⁵ See Williams, Raymond, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Routledge, 2003)

¹⁶ See Caldwell, John Thornton, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995)

¹⁷ Ellis, John, *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video* (London: Routledge, 1992) p.137

¹⁸ Jacobs, Jason, *The Intimate Screen: Early British Television Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p.1

Whether live or on tape, much of television - from news programs and talk shows to soap operas and situation comedies - creates the impression that we are watching events as they take place. Whatever the format, television's 'immediate presence' invokes the illusion of a reality presented directly and expressly for the viewer.¹⁹

Even in fictional television, the impression is given that the events on the screen are merely relayed to the viewer, that there is no break in time. The more primitive technological conditions of early television meant that this generally was the case, but the illusion which Flitterman-Lewis identifies as central to television means that even those filmed inserts which were used in early programming carried the appearance of being part of an immediate relay of events, whether the viewer was able to identify the different quality of the film medium on their small screen or not. This concept of television as a live relay of events was very much the dominant idea in the early BBC Television Service, yet the use of pre-recorded sound and vision to expand the spatial and temporal boundaries of television was a feature of this early period.

With regard to this examination of historical television, Helen Wheatley has raised what she considers to be four key problems in television history, particularly as seen from a British perspective, beginning with the 'problem' of national specificity and moving on to:

the (over-)privileging of institutional histories of television;
the problem of nostalgia and the need to confront the connection between popular and academic histories of the medium; and
the question of access to, and survival of, material that shapes our sense of television history.²⁰

These issues are particularly relevant to this study, and have necessarily shaped approaches taken. With regard to national specificity, this thesis has had to deal with a number of issues. As a British scholar working in a British context, brought up through the British education system during a particular period of time, my methods and assumptions are obviously informed by this specific national context. However,

¹⁹ Flitterman-Lewis, Sandy, "Psychoanalysis, Film and Television" in Allen, Robert (ed.), *Channels of Discourse Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1992) p.219

²⁰ Wheatley, Helen, "Introduction" in *Re-Viewing Television History: Critical Issues in Television History* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2007) p.9

because of the nature of that system and of that period, my influences are international. The period under study in this thesis represents a different period and a different set of international relations and influences, but the end result is still particularly national, particularly British and so the analysis of television undertaken here has to be understood as far as possible in those terms, while acknowledging the impossibility of fully understanding / absorbing those terms.

The nature of the genre under study also demands a national specificity that is often missing in studies of science fiction. As the genre, at least in its cinematic and televisual incarnations, is dominated by American product, the general characteristics of American science fiction are often widely understood as those of science fiction in general. However, the programmes discussed here are particularly British, with European and domestic influences particularly dominating during the early period, but with transatlantic influences developing throughout the period covered by this thesis. The relationship of Britain to other nations, particularly the United States, in terms of political and economic power and dependence and cultural interdependence, is key to understanding the development of the genre of “science fiction” in Britain.

The issue of nostalgia, and the connections and differences between academic and popular histories, is particularly complex when popular genres and texts are considered, as is the case here. Popular histories of and reference guides to television science fiction have been key resources, particularly in the early development of this thesis. However, their limitations have also driven some of the basic archival research necessary for this study: while Roger Fulton's *Encyclopedia of TV Science Fiction* is an impressive piece of research, it is particularly lacking in coverage of the very earliest science fiction programming, a point that was made clear in the web article *British Telefantasy Began in 1963*,²¹ which was once again aimed at a popular, but informed, fan audience. While both works presented, in differing ways, histories of British television science fiction, they, like similar articles on TV science fiction programme history that are published in popular magazines such as *TV Zone*, are interested primarily in the “what” and the “who”

²¹ Cooper, Nick, “British Telefantasy Began in 1963”, <http://www.625.org.uk/pre1963/pre1963.htm> accessed 17th July 2008

and the “when” of history, together with any entertaining anecdotes that can be associated with the pieces. Nevertheless, such pieces do drive interest in these subjects and provide initial inspiration, and their entertainment value and appeal is hard to deny.

The lack of academic histories and analyses to replace and complement these popular works has meant that the dangers of approaching this subject from a popular, nostalgia-driven viewpoint have been numerous. Even where academic works do exist, they have a tendency to focus on canonical productions such as the Quatermass serials, *Doctor Who* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as is the case with Catherine Johnson’s *Telefantasy*, Jason Jacobs’ *The Intimate Screen*, John R. Cook and Peter Wright’s edited collection *British Television Science Fiction: A Hitchhiker’s Guide*, and Lez Cooke’s *British Television Drama: A History*. This is partly a result of the fourth issue that Wheatley identified, that of access to material, as the only surviving audio-visual recordings of science fiction productions from the period under discussion are the first two episodes of *The Quatermass Experiment*, the single play *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and all six episodes of *Quatermass II*. Unsurprisingly, these programmes have been discussed far more than those that have been lost, such as the early adaptations of *R.U.R.* (1938 and 1948) and *The Time Machine* (1949), which experimented with the possibilities of the television medium to an arguably greater extent than any of Rudolph Cartier’s science fiction productions, regardless of Cartier’s clear talent. Throughout this thesis, the question of why particular texts have been ignored or emphasised is returned to regularly. The exaltation of certain texts over others has led to a distortion of the history of television, but the causes and effects of this distortion are not as easy to determine as may be expected, and the shifting nature of television history and its continual rewriting is evident from the very earliest days of the television service.

The structure and content of this thesis are in part intended as a corrective to this distorting promotion of particular texts within television history. Archival research has been used to reveal information about all of the programmes during the period 1936 to 1955 that could be understood as “science fiction” so that each could be interpreted as part of a wider picture. Even so, the material available has clearly restricted the possibilities for interpretation of each text; the BBC Written Archives

Centre has provided much useful information, but for some productions, such as the 1938 *R.U.R.*, only a few production notes are available, alongside a *Radio Times* listing. For other productions not even this is available, while others are represented by a full camera script, as is the case with *Stranger From Space* (1951-1953), or even, in the rare cases mentioned above, actual recordings. Nevertheless, this historical approach avoids some of the issues with a case study-based approach, which privileges certain texts above others and calls for individual texts to represent broader movements, while retaining the level of detailed analysis of the case study approach, thanks to the limited number of programmes available and the restricted amount of information available on those productions.

Structure

This thesis is structured as four main sections, each subdivided into two chapters. The overall progression of the thesis is roughly chronological, allowing for the development of ideas of historical change that enhance the understanding of each individual text as well as overall themes within their historical context. Each section, and each chapter, however, concentrates on a particular theme, which may mean occasionally stepping backwards or forwards chronologically to emphasise thematic connections between texts, or the development of a particular concept.

Section One: The Development of Style particularly engages with the history of early television aesthetics that Jason Jacobs described in *The Intimate Screen*. **Spectacle, Effects and Style: *R.U.R.* and the First Television Science Fiction** examines the 1938 and 1948 adaptations of this seminal stage play, and illustrates how the adaptations took different approaches to the possibilities offered by fantastic genres to experiment with the new technology of television.

Experiments in Form: *The Time Machine* and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and the Development of the Intimate Screen then looks at how the rapid growth in the post-war television audience led to an understanding within the BBC Television Service that the approach to programming had to change to meet the needs of an audience that was larger and encompassed a wider section of the social scale than before the war. While there was still a place for experimentation in form,

the understanding of this expanded audience led to a more rigid concept of what television drama should look like and how it should tell its narratives.

Section Two: The Development of Genre concentrates on the issue of science fiction as a genre, particularly in relation to the way that the BBC Television Service engaged with the genre. **Variations in Genre: Exploring the Breadth of Early British Television Science Fiction** examines a number of productions to illustrate the variety of science fiction sub-genres that were produced in this period, including the pastoral, the post-apocalypse, the industrial / scientific satire and the children's serial. The cultural and social associations of the genre, together with its growth and reactions to its growth, are investigated in **The BBC Versus Science Fiction: Acceptance and Opposition in Genre Terms**, which scrutinises the actual usage of the term "science fiction" in various media, but particularly the BBC Television Service. Once again, the issues of how the BBC Television Service was associating genre with its understanding of its audience forms the central theme for this section.

One of the standard narratives of television history is examined in **Section Three: Televisual Revolutions**, which puts the claims made by Nigel Kneale and Rudolph Cartier about the originality of the visual and pacing aspects of their Quatermass serials into its historical context. **"Sadists and Readers of Horror Comics": The Quatermass Experiment, Nineteen Eighty-Four, the BBC, Middlebrow Culture and the Horror Comics Campaign** continues the examination of the issue of how the audience was perceived to understand genre and how issues of taste and class relate to genre by discussing Kneale and Cartier's canonical collaborations in relation to a key 1950s moral panic. **Reasons for Survival: Why Remember Quatermass?** engages with one of the historiographical issues of this thesis: the idea of the television canon and why particular texts are privileged, by examining the Kneale / Cartier collaborations alongside forgotten texts in the form of *Time Slip* (1953) and *The Lost Planet* (1953).

Section Four: "More Than Mere Repetition": "Sequelisation" and the Construction of Identity reaches the historical point where the BBC Television Service lost its monopoly and so had to establish a particular, distinct identity for itself in relation to the new, commercial ITV service. **Sequelisation and the**

Construction of Identity examines the way that the BBC Television Service built on its own history, producing sequel serials in the form of *Quatermass II* (1955) and *Return to the Lost Planet* (1954), emphasising the continued presence of writers like Nigel Kneale and also drawing upon connections between BBC television and other media. However, the Television Service had by this point had to develop a strong bureaucracy, partly due to its simple expansion and maturation, but also as a specific response to impending competition from ITV. A reaction against this increased bureaucratisation can be seen in the work of Nigel Kneale, but it also connects with a wider concern about loss of individuality in the face of government control and developments in science and technology which science fiction offered an arena for expressing. This is explored in **The Desire for Individuality**.

Taken together, these sections show how the BBC Television Service developed in its understanding of its developing audience and in the use of the science fiction genre. The genre offered potential for exploring the technology of the television medium and its formal and narrative possibilities, while also allowing for an engagement of social concerns through a symbolic or analogic approach. Such an approach allows for a distancing from reality that can either bring issues into sharper focus by disconnecting them from the complexity of everyday life, or for allowing a feeling of escape from that existence and its concerns. The reactions of the audience to these possibilities, and the BBC's formations of audience taste, interact particularly around these notions of genre, and of suitability and "tastefulness". In turn, these actual reactions and perceived formations of audience serve to illustrate concerns about social change that were prevalent in post-war Britain. By looking at historical formulations of the possibilities of technology and society, we can gain greater insight into social concerns of the time, but also into the way that television currently operates with regard to genre and audience and social concerns.

Programme Chronology

1938	<i>R.U.R.</i>
1948	<i>R.U.R.</i> <i>Take Back Your Freedom</i>
1949	<i>The Time Machine</i> <i>Summer Day's Dream</i>
1950	<i>The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde</i>
1951	<i>Stranger from Space</i>
1952	<i>Mystery Story</i>
1953	<i>Number Three</i> <i>The Quatermass Experiment</i> <i>Time Slip</i>
1954	<i>The Lost Planet</i> <i>Nineteen Eighty-Four</i>
1955	<i>Return to the Lost Planet</i> <i>The Voices</i> <i>The Creature</i> <i>Quatermass II</i>

Section One: The Development of Style

Chapter One:

Spectacle, Effects and Style: *R.U.R.* and the First Television Science Fiction

In their account of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* in film and television, Roberta Pearson and Máire Messenger-Davies describe two sequences in which Captain Jean-Luc Picard encounters the alien Borg, one of which is from the television series, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and one of which is from *Star Trek: First Contact*, a feature film extension of the franchise. In their analysis of these two sequences, they argue that while they “function similarly with regard to narrative content”, they feature “differences in scale”, which are “also differences in narrative style”.¹ While Pearson and Messenger-Davies argue that these differences “stem not from inherent characteristics of television and film, but historically specific conditions of production and reception”, they nonetheless claim that there is “a higher degree of spectacle in *Trek* cinema than television”² and that this is largely due to the inferior quality of the visual image of television: “Screen size still determines the aesthetics of television, the smaller, flatter and less detailed image both militating against long-shot spectacle, and encouraging close and medium close shots of characters, which in turn encourage certain kinds of genres and narratives.”³

Although this argument presents itself as simply about differences within the *Star Trek* franchise, it reproduces familiar oppositions between the handling of science fiction in film and television. For example, given that cinema is seen as a predominantly visual medium, writing about science fiction cinema has tended to focus on questions of spectacle. As Annette Kuhn has argued:

¹ Pearson, Roberta E. and Máire Messenger-Davies, “‘You’re not going to see that on TV’: *Star Trek: The Next Generation* in Film and Television” in Mark Jancovich and James Lyons (eds.), *Quality Popular Television* (London: BFi, 2003) p.103

² Pearson and Messenger-Davies, “‘You’re not going to see that on TV’”, p.105

³ Pearson and Messenger-Davies, “‘You’re not going to see that on TV’”, p.110

the most obvious difference between science fiction as literature and science fiction as film lies in the latter's mobilization of the visible, the spectacle. If cinema is one among a number of narrative media, it also has its own language, its own codes, through which it makes meaning and tells stories. These codes derive from cinema's capacity to *show* the fictional worlds of the narratives it creates, literally putting them on display for spectators to look at. The peculiar qualities of cinematic storytelling hinge crucially on the very visibility of the film image, and on the fact that 'reading' a film necessarily involves looking at it.⁴

In other words, while literary science fiction may *describe* the spectacular, it is the particular quality of cinema to *depict* the spectacular.

This sense of spectacle is also related to one of scale and the Romantic sense of the sublime, which Bukatman argues is one of the key appeals of science fiction:

The precise function of science fiction, in many ways, is to *create* the boundless and infinite stuff of sublime experience, and thus to produce a sense of transcendence beyond human finitudes (true to the form of the sublime, most works produce transcendence of, and acknowledgement of, human limits). Indeed, the objects of science fiction are characterized by a spatiotemporal grandeur revealed by the titles alone: *A Space Odyssey*, *Last and First Men*, *When Worlds Collide*, *The Star Maker* (and consider the titles of early science-fiction magazines: *Astounding*, *Amazing*, *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, *Weird Tales*).⁵

While this description would apply as much to literature as film, it is the function of film spectacle to achieve this sense of the sublime. In their study of *Judge Dredd*, Martin Barker and Kate Brookes discuss a series of film viewers for whom the pleasure of science fiction was precisely in the visceral response to spectacular imagery.⁶

For Vivian Sobchack science fiction film is crucially organised around spectacle, which exists to *visualise* the sense of otherness which is so crucial to the sublime experience:

The major visual impulse of all SF films is to pictorialize the nonexistent, the strange and the totally alien - and to do so with a verisimilitude which is, at times, documentary in flavor and style. While we

⁴ Kuhn, Annette, "Introduction" in Annette Kuhn, *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema* (London: Verso, 1990) p.6

⁵ Bukatman, Scott, "The Artificial Infinite: On Special Effects and the Sublime" in Annette Kuhn, *Alien Zone II: the spaces of science fiction* (London: Verso, 1999), pp.256-257

⁶ Barker, Martin and Kate Brooks, *Knowing Audiences: Judge Dredd, Its Friends, Fans and Foes* (Luton: University of Luton Press, 1998)

are invited to wonder at what we see, the films strive primarily for our belief, not our suspension of disbelief.⁷

Similarly, Annette Kuhn has spoken about the foregrounding of spectacle in science fiction films,⁸ while Barry Keith Grant has suggested that special effects “constitute one of the particular pleasures of the genre. The genre's reliance on special effects is itself an enactment of science fiction's thematic concern with technology.”⁹

As a result, science fiction film has long been associated with special effects. Many histories of science fiction cinema begin with Méliès and his special effects spectacles, films that were far more concerned with showing off camera trickery and stagecraft than with providing any coherent narrative.¹⁰ Indeed, many critics site them as science fiction films precisely because of their spectacular special effects, even though narrative motivations for these effects were as likely to be magical as they were scientific. Indeed, David Shipman has noted that the “scientists” who gather at the start of *Voyage Dans La Lune* (1902) wear “the hats and cloaks of wizards”.¹¹

In contrast, television science fiction is often claimed to be more concerned with ideas than spectacle, with the concepts contained within the narrative rather than with the images that help to convey that narrative. The small screen size, low resolution and the practicalities of live television production are all claimed to mitigate against the employment of the sort of spectacular scale and imagery associated with cinematic science fiction. Television before 1955 certainly was not capable of the “complete sensory and bodily engulfment” that Annette Kuhn associates with “Big-budget science-fiction extravaganzas”,¹² while Pearson and

⁷ Sobchack, Vivian, *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2001), p.88

⁸ See Kuhn, Annette, “Introduction” in Kuhn, *Alien Zone II*, p.5

⁹ Grant, Barry Keith, “‘Sensuous Elaboration’: Reason and the Visible in the Science Fiction Film” in Kuhn, *Alien Zone II*, p.21

¹⁰ See, for example, Shipman, David, *A Pictorial History of Science Fiction Films* (Twickenham: Hamlyn, 1985); Telotte, J.P., *Science Fiction Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Brosnan, John, *Future Tense: The Cinema of Science Fiction* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1978), although Brosnan would later express doubt about Méliès' position as a science fiction pioneer in *The Primal Screen: A History of Science Fiction Film* (London: Orbit, 1991).

¹¹ Shipman, *Pictorial History of Science Fiction Films*, p.14

¹² Kuhn, Annette, “Introduction” in Kuhn, *Alien Zone II*, p.5

Messenger-Davies found that the practicalities of even 1990s television production and the different expectations of television and cinema audiences meant that films based on the series *Star Trek: The Next Generation* focussed more on action and spectacle than even close episodic television counterparts.

Even those who champion science fiction television claim that its intimacy tends to make it a more ideas-driven form of science fiction rather than one organised around visual effects. Ursula Le Guin, for example, has written regarding her experience of the production of a television version of one of her novels, stating that “In television there’s no need for the spectacular; in fact the medium rather leads away from it - inward; in science-fiction terms, from outer to inner space.”¹³ Yet an examination of scripts and production files for the BBC’s earliest science fiction programming demonstrates that science fiction’s association with visual imagery was highly valued precisely because it provided opportunities for television to explore and demonstrate the capabilities of this new medium. In doing so, producers and designers contributed to the debate regarding what television was, challenging the dominant idea that television was best suited to the relay of actual current events from where they were taking place to the home of the viewer.

However, there is another aspect to cinema’s usage of spectacle and its suitability to the television screen. A modern cinema is set up with the intention of focussing the audience’s attention on the screen and involving them, through the size of the image, the darkness of the rest of the room and the enveloping nature of the sound, with the narrative displayed on the screen. Television, on the other hand, is frequently understood as a piece of domestic apparatus, its small screen only one possible point of focus in the room, in which other activities may well be taking place to distract the supposed viewer, so, as John Ellis suggested in *Visible Fictions* (1982, revised edition 1992), it will only be the subject of glances rather than the continual, focussed gaze of the cinema audience. While this idea has its uses, and is certainly applicable at certain times and under certain conditions, it is also, like Raymond Williams’ concept of televisual flow¹⁴ and John Thornton Caldwell’s

¹³ Le Guin, Ursula, “Working on ‘The Lathe’” in *Dancing at the Edge of the World* (London: Paladin, 1992) p.32

¹⁴ As explained in Williams, Raymond, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London:

notion of televisuality¹⁵ drawn from a specific set of references at a specific time. These ideas arose from multichannel, commercial television environments where television was an established part of daily life, meaning that there are issues with utilising them directly in relation to monopoly public service broadcasting in Britain.

In contrast to the environments in which Ellis, Williams and Caldwell developed their theories, British television before 1955 was a recently developed monopoly. The idea of early television as a static, theatrical medium has its roots in the heavy reliance of the medium on theatre for material during these formative years, whether that material was in the form of musical acts, comedians or dramatic pieces. The idea that this led to visually dull productions is one that has continued, in part because the ongoing development of the techniques and technology of television has meant that the visual complexity and appeal of productions is now much richer and more controlled than in the days of live television.

Another contribution to this idea of the lack of visual appeal of early television came from within the ranks of those working in the field, with Nigel Kneale describing how:

One fellow felt that a TV drama should be produced like a radio play, where the actors line up and then come to the microphone one by one, peeling off left and right once they've said their lines. Somebody else shot everything in close-up; at least the faces were in focus but it was all dreadfully monotonous and uninteresting - all you were getting was cut, cut, cut.¹⁶

Kneale also emphasises that this was tied up with “various mystiques about What Television Should Be. [Television drama producers had] nearly all worked in radio - you couldn't be a big BBC man in television in those days.”¹⁷ Clearly Kneale had his own position in the development of television drama to promote, alongside that of producer Rudolph Cartier, and their undoubted importance to the field will be

Routledge, 2003)

¹⁵ Described in Caldwell, John Thornton, *Televisuality: Style Crisis and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995). Caldwell himself says that, “Televisuality cannot be theorised apart from the crisis that network television underwent after 1980.” p.10

¹⁶ Nigel Kneale quoted in Petley, Julian, “The Manxman” in *Monthly Film Bulletin*, March 1989, p.91. Kneale says almost exactly the same thing in an interview with Paul Wells, published as “Apocalypse then! The ultimate monstrosity and strange things on the coast ... an interview with Nigel Kneale” in Hunter, I.Q. (ed.), *British Science Fiction Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1999)

¹⁷ Kneale in Petley, “The Manxman”, p.91

examined in greater detail in later chapters. His statements indicate the debt of early British television not to the theatre, which incorporates the visual amongst its appeals, but to the sound-only medium of radio, particularly in the statement that television drama producers had “nearly all worked in radio”.¹⁸ He emphasises the lack of visual appeal, and even the lack of interest in and willingness to engage with visual appeal, particularly in his suggestion that one producer wanted all of the actors to deliver their lines to a single microphone on camera, “like a radio play”.¹⁹

This idea of early British television has been challenged by Jason Jacobs in his *The Intimate Screen: Early British Television Drama*, which utilised written archive material to illustrate the ways in which producers developed the techniques of television as a medium with its own identity, independent from theatre, radio and film. He explicitly points out the exaggerations in Kneale’s statement regarding producers’ ideas of how to produce a television play, writing, “there is no other record of the ‘radio’ idea, although it sounds like a Haley or Gielgud thinking”,²⁰ while acknowledging that Kneale and Cartier did break with the usage of television as an intimate medium utilising frequent close-ups and enclosed settings.

However, Jacobs also shows that this opening out of the television image was simply a new approach, albeit a highly important one, in the ongoing development of television technique. He also points out that “Few drama producers had transferred to television from a career in BBC radio (Royston Morley, who had worked in radio drama and features, is a notable exception), and almost all of them had a background in visual arts, mainly theatre or cinema”.²¹ This clearly breaks down the radio aspect of Kneale’s argument even further, while emphasising in return that the visual aspect of television was a consideration in engaging producers. As a result of these engagements, and as part of that discussion about “What Television Should Be” that Kneale mentions, there was a sense of experimentation with the visual possibilities of television, as production staff worked out what could be done and how it could be accomplished with the limited resources available. Far from being a dull and static

¹⁸ Kneale in Petley, “The Manxman”, p.91

¹⁹ Kneale in Petley, “The Manxman”, p.91

²⁰ Jacobs, Jason, *The Intimate Screen: Early British Television Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p.135

²¹ Jacobs, *The Intimate Screen*, p.37

visual medium, although there were almost certainly times when it was those things, early British television was the focus of some intense experimentation.

Television in Britain before 1955 still had a special place in the household. Not only was it something new, and so more likely to draw the attention, but the fact of there being only one channel meant that viewers did not have the opportunity to move so freely from programme to programme, as in a multichannel world. Instead, the choice was between watching what was on television and doing something else. Indeed, a BBC survey of television viewers and radio listeners in 1948 found:

Only one viewer in twenty intimated that while he watched TV he made an attempt to do something else at the same time; whereas eleven listeners in twenty showed that when listening in the peak hours of the evening they were simultaneously engaged in some other activity.²²

The technical constraints which seem to make early television in particular less suitable for spectacular visuals, such as the small screen and poor image brightness, also encourage a more active viewing style by requiring more active concentration. With the curtains drawn and the lights low so that the television picture would stand out as much as possible, undertaking other activities while watching would also become more difficult and the attention would be more focussed, in the same way that the dimmed lights of a cinema help to focus the attention.

Not only that, but the poor resolution of early sets may actually have been an advantage in terms of special effects by concealing some of the flaws and encouraging the viewer to respond to suggestion rather than to a clear image on the screen. For example, Nigel Kneale described the effect depicting the alien monstrosity from the end of *The Quatermass Experiment* as, “my two hands in rubber gloves liberally stuck over with vegetation. [...] Against the odds, it worked. The fuzzy cameras helped and the audience's imagination did the rest.”²³

This chapter examines television shows that have received little attention beyond passing mentions in the history of television science fiction, despite being acknowledged as the first of their kind, and it does so to explore the ways in which

²² Silvey, Robert, “An Enquiry into Television Viewing” in *BBC Quarterly*, Vol.IV, no.4, Winter 1949-50, p.234. Television viewers were compared with people who listened to the radio but did not own a television in order to assess the impact of television viewing.

²³ Kneale, Nigel, “Foreword” to *The Quatermass Experiment* (London: Arrow Books, 1979) p.7

they were used in the first phase of visual experimentation in television. This incorporates the development of the service after its purely experimental phase before 1936, but before the expansion of the broadcast area and the threat of competition brought a standardisation of form and approach. During this period, producers were still freely able to experiment with the technology and capabilities of television, and science fiction provided them with a type of drama particularly suited to this experimentation. However, a trend also developed over this period whereby the dominant aesthetic for television drama became a realist one, leading to an increasing rejection of the abilities of television to utilise non-realistic, symbolic staging, imagery and effects.

This section will therefore begin by focussing on the 1938 adaptation of *R.U.R.*, which served very clearly as a site of visual experimentation. It then moves on to the 1948 production of the same play, which, despite being produced and adapted by the same person as the 1938 production, experimented differently with the possibilities of television visuals. The next chapter in this section shows how the 1949 adaptation of *The Time Machine* sought to expand beyond the spatial and temporal restrictions of live television drama which the producer of the two *R.U.R.* adaptations had sought to embrace. Finally, the 1950 adaptation of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* illustrates how the tendency towards “realism” in television drama became a default stylistic position, affecting even productions in fantasy genres.

R.U.R. (1938)

The first piece of science fiction on British television was a trailer for the following week’s performance of an adaptation of Karel Čapek’s play *R.U.R.*. This trailer was performed live on two occasions on 4th February 1938 and featured the characters of Domain, Helena and Radius, together with background sounds on sound effects records. This is described in the Programmes As Broadcast files, which record timings and details of actual, as opposed to planned, broadcasts, and so include details of changes to schedules due to technical problems, altered plans, etc.. These are the only records for these trailers.

Čapek's play has now become accepted as a part of the science fiction canon, associating it retrospectively with a range of other texts. This highlights connections with material such as *BladeRunner* (1982), the Terminator franchise (films 1984, 1991, 2003, 2009; television 2008-2009) or *Battlestar Galactica* (1978, 1980, 2003-2009), through the concept of artificially created workers revolting against mankind. During the 1920s and 1930s, without the concept of "science fiction" as a separate genre, *R.U.R.* was still associated with other texts which we now also recognise as part of that genre, such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818),²⁴ which Brian Aldiss and others have taken as the beginning of science fiction as a genre.²⁵ Other reviews of the play related it to the broad genre of "fantasy",²⁶ placing the television adaptations within the broader genre of "telefantasy", as the term is used by Catherine Johnson to refer to "a wide range of fantasy, science-fiction and horror television".²⁷

However, while "telefantasy" may be a term specifically associated with fandom,²⁸ it must be remembered that *R.U.R.* was a popular success, being performed by a number of repertory companies around the country in the 1920s and 1930s, and on radio in 1927, 1930 and 1933, and which "popularized a new word in the language."²⁹ So while it would be correct to think of *R.U.R.* as associated with a technological, scientific fantasy, which we would now refer to as "science fiction", it would be wrong to think that this meant that the audience for the play would be the stereotypical science fiction fan of today; rather, the audience was a general, or even "high culture" one. The adaptation of such a popular text for television brought with it an additional draw, or, as John Caughie has described it, "a prior seal of approval from the West End theatre",³⁰ a characteristic that put it in line with "the vast

²⁴ "Our Special Correspondent", "'The Makropoulos Secret' by Karel Capek", *The Times*, 11 December 1929, p.12

²⁵ See, for example, Aldiss, Brian and David Wingrove, *Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction* (London: Paladin, 1988), p.19; Alkon, quoted in Roberts, Adam, *Science Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.93

²⁶ Anon., "'R.U.R.' by Karel Capek", *The Times*, 8 November 1932, p.12

²⁷ Johnson, Catherine, *Telefantasy* (London: BFi Publishing, 2005) p.2

²⁸ Johnson, *Telefantasy*, p.2

²⁹ Anon., "'R.U.R.' by Karel Capek", *The Times*, 8 November 1932, p.12

³⁰ Caughie, John, "Before the Golden Age: Early Television Drama" in John Corner (ed.), *Critical*

majority of the single plays and serials produced by the BBC until the 1960s”.³¹ Adam Roberts also connects the play with other High Modernist texts such as Aldous Huxley’s *Point Counter Point* (1928) and *Brave New World* (1932), Yevgeny Zamiatin’s *We* (1920; English translation 1924) and Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927).³² This places *R.U.R.* within an anti-technological and arguably “self-consciously elitist” Modernist “high culture”,³³ rather than the popular culture of pulp science fiction and modern science fiction television audience research such as that conducted by Tulloch and Jenkins with regard to *Doctor Who* and *Star Trek* audiences.

Domain is the head of the company Rossum’s Universal Robots, or R.U.R., that gives the play its name and produces the artificial workers that are the focus of the drama. Helena is a member of the Humanity League who goes to R.U.R. with the intention of freeing the robots, but who marries Domain and encourages the company’s scientists to produce robots with emotion. Radius is one of the first robots with desire and advanced reasoning. Given this combination of characters and the demands of a trailer to intrigue and entice a potential audience, the scene performed was probably the crucial section where Radius reveals his dissatisfaction and the threat that robots like him represent for mankind. After this point, the robots, who had previously served mankind, revolt and destroy humanity.

R.U.R. was mounted in a 35 minute version twice on 11th February 1938 by the BBC Television service, at 3:20pm and 9:20pm, produced and adapted by Jan Bussell. While the brevity of this version may suggest that it would simply adapt a portion of the original play, probably the second and third acts depicting the robot revolt and its aftermath, there are several indications that a condensed version of the entire text, including the scene-setting act one, was produced. For example, a note for the 1938 production states, “telecine required”.³⁴ This was probably for the filmed titles advertising Rossum’s Universal Robots, as follows:

Ideas in Television Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p.27

³¹ Caughie, “Before the Golden Age”, p.27

³² Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction*, p.159

³³ Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction*, p.173

³⁴ BBC Written Archives Centre, R.U.R., T5/443, 11 February (no year given). The measurements in feet here refer to the length of film used for each caption.

1. 'Cheap Labour' comes up and stands for ten feet.
2. A card 'Robots for the Tropics £15 each' is dropped diagonally on it and holds for six feet.
3. A card 'Cheaper your output with Rossum's Robots' is dropped on this and holds for twelve feet.³⁵

The presence of these titles suggests that the production does not focus entirely on the revolt but does include an establishing section. This is confirmed by the presence of a caption reading "Five Years Later".³⁶ Finally, Paul Hayes has pointed out that the presence of four female roles in the BBC production also indicates that this is an adaptation of the full play.³⁷ This shows that this was an adaptation conceived as a television drama, rather than as a *Theatre Parade*-style selection of scenes from a current theatrical production, or as a re-production of a stage play on a television stage. This, in turn, indicates that while Caughie may have been correct in arguing that television benefited from the previous success of stage productions of plays, it was not subservient to the theatre, even at this early stage.

The play was reviewed in *The Times* on 14th February 1938, with the reviewer stating that the play was, "a good choice for television" and that, "Rossum's Universal Robots, are a fit subject for the television screen, though they were represented, curiously enough, as rather more human than when they appeared on the stage."³⁸ This focus on the robots rather than the doomed humans supports the reviewer's explicit statement that they have understood the play as a satire and so recognised the robots as symbolic of suppressed workers across the world.

However, the review concentrates not on the symbolic value of the robots, but on their physical representation. The television screen provides a clearer image of the appearance of individual characters through use of the close-up, as opposed to the detail-blurring distance of a stage performance. Where the producer of the stage version may well have indicated the artificial nature of the robots in a more obvious manner in order to highlight their difference, for this reviewer at least Bussell's

³⁵ BBC WAC, R.U.R., T5/443, 3 February 1938

³⁶ BBC WAC, R.U.R., T5/443, 24 January 1938

³⁷ Hayes, Paul, "British Telefantasy: As It Began", *The Mausoleum Club*, http://www.the-mausoleum-club.org.uk/RUR/rur_paul_hayes.htm, accessed 2 November 2005

³⁸ Anon., "Televised Drama: Karel Capek's 'R.U.R.'", *The Times*, 14 February 1938, p.23

choice of costuming and make-up for the robots emphasised their near-human nature. Yet a comparison of a surviving photograph of this television production with a photograph of the stage production shows that the reviewer for *The Times* is mistaken in their assertion that the television production's robots looked more human than the stage productions, as can be seen in figures 1 and 2 below. The 1938 television production featured metallic-garbed robots with squared-off shoulders and helmets, with pale, possibly metallic, faces and darkened lips, their make-up more pronounced than that of the human characters, while the stage production utilised essentially human-looking, if rubber-overalled, robots. This would be more in line with Čapek's intentions that the robots be indistinguishable from humans, but the difference in presentation, whichever version did use more human-looking robots, still illustrates the way that television producers did not feel obliged to reproduce stage successes, but were free to adapt original texts as new productions specifically for television.



Figure 1: R.U.R. 1938 Television Production



Figure 2: R.U.R. 1923 London Stage Production

The *Times* reviewer also finds the horrific satire of the play suited to the television form:

The robot factory is surrounded, and the handful of human beings within know that there is no quarter to be expected from artificial people, and when at last they do invade the factory the robots merely ejaculate ‘Finished’ as each man is polished off. This is the real logical ending to the play; but the author, feeling perhaps that he had been too brutal, added a sentimental last scene, in which two robots fall in love – a robot Adam and Eve – which seemed a mistake on the stage, and an even greater mistake in the intimate atmosphere of television.³⁹

The intimacy of the television screen brings the emotional effects of the production into sharper focus, emphasising the contrast between the massacre of the humans by unfeeling robots and the sentimentality of the final scene. Jason Jacobs has described one of the interpretations of “intimacy” in early television drama production as “the revelation and display of the character’s inner feelings and emotions, effected by a close-up style of multi-camera studio production”.⁴⁰ This *Times* review provides an example of this understanding within its historical context, together with a reaction that highlights the danger of the technique in terms of maintaining audience

³⁹ Anon., “Karel Capek’s ‘R.U.R.’”, p.23

⁴⁰ Jacobs, *The Intimate Screen*, p.8

sympathy. The juxtaposition of horror and sentimentality so close together, brought into the home, was simply too much, and this perceived flaw in the play was magnified by this closeness.

This shows how reviewers, and presumably viewers, were beginning to negotiate an understanding of what was and was not suitable to this new medium and how it stood in relation to other media. This growing understanding is emphasised by the review of the production from *The Daily Telegraph*, which consisted of five paragraphs, of which only one was not concerned with the technical and formal aspects of the production and instead focused on the “emotional viewpoint”. The review noted that the play “served to show once again that, though cramped in time and space, a television programme may yet be effective entertainment.”⁴¹ Indeed, Bussell was noted to have accomplished this through “some interesting innovations with changing camera angles and the use of models. Some of the close-ups were photographic triumphs of truly remarkable quality.” Without access to visual reference material related to this production, beyond one low resolution image which allowed reference to the appearance of the robots, it is not really possible to do anything other than speculate as to what these “innovations” may have actually been, or in what way the close-ups may have been “triumphs”. However, these comments once again emphasise that there was still an attempt to engage with and understand the technical possibilities of television within those producing it and those, like reviewers, who were seeking to interpret and comment upon the productions for the wider public.

This cramped intimacy may be the very reason why Bussell retained this final scene in his adaptation, despite already having condensed the play significantly. Bussell considered “the keynote of television” to be “the intimate small screen close-up, which brings performers right into the family group at the fireside.”⁴² The shock of the massacre of the last humans is softened by the final scene, which provides hope and thereby encourages the viewer to remember this viewing of a television play as a pleasurable experience and so something which they might enjoy doing

⁴¹ Gander, L.Marsland, “‘R.U.R.’ Televised: Clever Close-Ups in Robot Play”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 12 February 1938

⁴² Bussell, Jan, *The Art of Television* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), p.68

again. Even in this early, experimental period, pleasing and retaining viewers was important.

Some of the difficulties of live television are also indicated by the review in the *Times*:

When there should have been silence there were unknown noises off, and long speeches and close-ups allowed us to forget the robot horde outside the beleaguered factory.⁴³

Once more, it is the very intimacy of the television style which presents problems for this reviewer. The camera's focus on the actor draws attention away from the wider setting, while the microphone which allows for some of that intimacy by clearly relaying the actor's words also picks up other sounds from within the studio, disrupting the focus at the very time when it is needed by opening up the image with unexplained, disconnected sound. However, it is also possible that the reviewer was not hearing unintentional sounds-off, but was instead failing to interpret the use of background sounds as part of the drama because they were not connected to particular action or props onscreen. The focus of this review on appearance: the human look of the robots, the use of close-ups, the intimacy of the television screen, all demonstrate how television was being perceived as a highly visual medium, as does the special effect used to show the 'robot horde' as they begin their massacre. Indeed, a survey of newspaper reviews and articles about television of this period held by the BBC Written Archive Centre shows a constant return to questions of televisual form and style and issues of technology and the suitability of different types of programming for the medium over questions of content or quality of performance.

Of a production of *St. Simeon Stylites* on 23rd September 1938, Jason Jacobs notes the intention to use a superimposition technique to show the arrival of "the Devil and his Friend" atop the column where the titular Saint is meditating. He says that "The superimposition was probably thought of as a visually innovative effect, as indeed it was."⁴⁴ However, the superimposition technique was not new to this production, having been used in the production of *R.U.R.* of 11th February 1938.

⁴³ Anon., "Karel Capek's 'R.U.R.'", p.23

⁴⁴ Jacobs, *The Intimate Screen*, p.59

Where its use in *St. Simeon Stylites* was to show a supernatural materialisation, in *R.U.R.* it was used to multiply the images of the rebellious robots to increase the apparent size of their army. It is quite possible that this technique was one that had already been experimented with, but the comment from the review of the play in *The Times* suggests that it was novel at least:

When the robots did appear at last they were difficult to see, as two pictures were superimposed (a television trick which should be used with caution), which spoilt the effect of both.⁴⁵

Considering the size of the typical television screen in 1938, and its comparatively low resolution, it seems unsurprising in retrospect that this technique would have proved visually muddling in this usage. Indeed, Bussell himself later noted that “Television is unsuccessful with crowds, panoramas, spectacles, but it reveals the souls of men better than any other medium.”⁴⁶ However, the very fact of its use shows that producers at the time were keen to experiment with the technology at their disposal to achieve particular emotional and narrative effects. While the end result may have “spoilt the effect of both” shots used for the superimposition, its intended effect was to depict what the *Times* reviewer describes as a “robot horde” with limited resources. The technique used was clearly obvious to the viewer, but what was important was not necessarily the realism of the shot but the effect that it conveyed. As long as it conveyed the impression of a mass of artificial murderers, then it had served its purpose. As Grace Wyndham Goldie noted regarding television drama:

It can offer any suggestion of scenery, a painted tree, a formal arch, and we accept them just as we should in the theatre, whereas in the cinema we demand more realism. And the more I see of television, the more I am convinced that plays which ask the audience to pretend, which demand a little make-believe, are particularly suited to it and particularly successful.⁴⁷

In part, this quality is down to the focus on the actor and the performance that television provides, but this is also a matter of expectation. While early television showed the realism of outside broadcasts of factual events, its entertainment was

⁴⁵ Anon., “Karel Čapek’s ‘R.U.R.’”, p.23

⁴⁶ Bussell, *The Art of Television*, p.106

⁴⁷ Goldie, Grace Wyndham, “Successful Plays”, *The Listener*, 25 May 1938, p.1115

primarily studio-bound or from a theatre, so theatrical representation rather than cinematic “realism” was the norm.

Yet the failure of the effect in the eyes of the *Times* reviewer shows the limits of experimentation which the audience were prepared to accept. The merging of images from two cameras resulted in an image that was difficult to interpret, which led this reviewer, at least, to consider the way in which it was achieved, and these two aspects combined to render the experiment a disappointment. This is similar to Michelle Pierson’s interpretation of responses to the “man in a rubber suit trampling models” aesthetic of the Japanese *kaijū eiga*⁴⁸ films:

The make-do aesthetic of many model films (used extensively in Toho Studios’ *Gojira / Godzilla* cycle of films) with their proximate, “near enough is good enough” approach to cinematic realism, meant that they were as likely to be viewed negatively by nonfans of the genre (i.e., as lacking in realism), as they were to be appreciated for their preparedness to risk this same critique by fans.⁴⁹

Pierson sees special effects fans as more prepared to accept effects and imagery which is more impressionistic than representational than non-fans, whose suspension of disbelief is damaged by the inclusion of non-representational material within a film with an otherwise realistic aesthetic. The introduction of the impressionistic superimposition effect at the climax of *R.U.R.*, following an otherwise realistic television presentation, would therefore have been a jolt to the perception, a disruption that the return to television realism for the “sentimental last scene”⁵⁰ would have emphasised.

In the original stage play all but one of the deaths of the main characters occur offstage, and without the cry of “Finished” from the robots as they complete each murder in a pre-echo of the ritual “Exterminate” of the Daleks or the “Delete” of the new version of the Cybermen in *Doctor Who*. In each case, the cry emphasises the core characteristic of the “monster”: hatred for the Daleks, computerised

⁴⁸ *Kaijū eiga* or “strange beast films” are the Japanese films focussed on giant monsters such as *Gojira / Godzilla*, *Mothra*, *Rhodan*. Their American counterparts (and inspiration) typically used stop-motion animation, as in *King Kong* (1933) or *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), while British films like *Gorgo* and *Konga* (both 1961) copied the Japanese in primarily using the cheaper technique of people in monster suits.

⁴⁹ Pierson, Michele, *Special Effects: Still in Search of Wonder* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p.73

⁵⁰ Anon., “Karel Capek’s ‘R.U.R.’”, p.23

dehumanisation for the Cybermen, and inhuman industrial operations for Bussell's version of Čapek's robots. This decision to bring the murders onstage suggests that Jan Bussell, the producer, was looking to expand the visual attributes of the play. Bringing the deaths together into one assault rather than spacing them out and having them as offstage action narrated by onstage characters also helped cut down the play's running time. Where characters in the stage play comment on the gathered mass of robots outside their compound, and therefore conveniently offstage, Bussell shows them to the audience, emphasising the visual nature of the medium.

The methodology of this thesis is illustrated by this information on *R.U.R.*. The existence of a superimposition effect within the program is only recorded in the review from *The Times*. There is no mention of it in the scant production material remaining at the BBC Written Archives. Bussell's *The Art of Television* suggests that he used the technique, but as he was responsible for both the 1938 and 1948 versions, it is not clear whether he used superimposition in both productions or, if only one, which one. Not only that, but Bussell does not state that he used superimposition in *R.U.R.*, merely that it and productions like it would be suitable for the use of the technique. In other words, the information that provides the basis for this thesis has to be drawn from a range of sources, not just any remaining production material, to provide a fuller picture of what the programme was. Once this is established, then critical and theoretical examination of that programme can take place, but without the preliminary research employing multiple resources, these examinations would be lacking a framework on which to operate.

The 1938 production of *R.U.R.* thus serves as an example of the earliest experimental period of television drama. It particularly illustrates the ways in which producers of the time were trying new techniques to better utilise and to test the scope and technology of television production in order to develop an identity for the medium which was different from its theatrical, radio and cinematic forebears. For Bussell, this meant embracing the limitations of television:

Film and television are quite different media and to borrow is a confession of weakness. Television should rejoice in its limitations, and exploit them. I have always found that the removal of limitations in any medium tends to destroy art. After all, there is no art in showing the real thing. What is shown should be interpretative - a comment on reality. The intimacy of the

television approach does not require views of rolling seas, deserts or forests. The viewers are immediately jolted out of their attentiveness. 'Ah, film,' they say, and may even consider it very clever. Nevertheless for that instant they have lost attention.⁵¹

As television effects pioneer Bernard Wilkie noted, the risks of attempting any sort of effects in live productions, such as the superimposition effect used to show the robot horde, were great, "but not to have attempted this sort of thing in those early days would have meant limiting all television drama to the mere photographing of stage plays."⁵² That this experimentation continued with the return of the television service after World War II is illustrated by the 1948 adaptation of *R.U.R.*, but this production also shows some traces of the decline in experimentation in television form during this period as the television audience expanded.

R.U.R. (1948)

With the return of the television service after the War "Many service gratuities were spent on the snobbery of possessing a television set",⁵³ with the result that the BBC, rather than trying to mould the audience, changed its approach to drama. While the broadcast area available in 1948 was no greater than that in 1938, a BBC viewer survey showed that "television was already spreading 'downwards' through the social pyramid."⁵⁴ This led to what some perceived as "the deliberate lowering of the intellectual standard of programmes, to cater for a new viewing public"⁵⁵ and the loss of creative freedom on the part of producers, who found themselves, "banned from programme planning meetings. Since that day it has been left to the 'heads of departments' to discuss and pass on programme suggestions and decisions."⁵⁶

The material available on the 1948 production of *R.U.R.* carries no suggestion of there being any particular visual effects or spectacular visual elements in the production. Where the 1938 adaptation had used the visual to compress and

⁵¹ Bussell, *The Art of Television*, p.55

⁵² Wilkie, Bernard, *The Technique of Special Effects in Television* (London: Focal Press, 1971) p.23

⁵³ Bussell, *The Art of Television*, p.12

⁵⁴ Silvey, Robert, "Viewers, Viewing and Leisure", *BBC Quarterly*, Vol.VII, No.1, Spring 1952, p.31

⁵⁵ Bussell, *The Art of Television*, p.12

⁵⁶ Bussell, *The Art of Television*, p.12

dramatise elements of the stage play, there is no indication that this was done in any spectacular way in 1948. There were six extras playing robots in the 1938 production of *R.U.R.*, and only four in the 1948 version. It does not appear that the multiplication technique was replicated in the later production, suggesting the possibility that the superimposition technique was accepted as not working, although another interpretation could be that Bussell simply did not want to repeat himself, particularly as he says in his 1952 *The Art of Television* regarding superimposition:

The trick can become very tedious if used for any length of time, but for the occasional ghost, or dream, or thought, it is a most useful attribute.⁵⁷

Bussell's concern about superimposition is an aesthetic one, recognising the issues of image confusion that are possible with the technique and indicating its usage should only be for non-realistic, representational purposes.

Bussell was of the opinion that television was a non-realistic medium:

On such a beautifully compact and small screen there is not room for the detail of realism. But there are great opportunities for the use of dramatic symbols. If viewers are boldly asked to use their imaginations they will co-operate wholeheartedly. But to try to deceive them is to steer a very shaky course.⁵⁸

Rather than using filmed inserts to expand the setting of the production and to introduce more elements of filmic realism, Bussell instead encourages the greater acknowledgement of the restrictions of the television studio and its live production methods and the embracing of this unreal situation and form. As a BBC television drama producer he took the opportunity to put this into practice:

In non-realistic productions I sometimes used what I called my 'Punch and Judy' technique. In such plays as *R.U.R.* or *Exercise Bowler* the detail of doors and the physical shape of rooms and how people move around in them becomes unimportant. I therefore used only dramatic movement, fading up one group of characters after another out of space as it were, as each twist in situation demanded. How they came to be in such groups was of no interest. What mattered was the relative impact of the characters on each other. I found the technique profoundly satisfying; but of course you could not apply it to drawing-room comedy.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Bussell, *The Art of Television*, p.106

⁵⁸ Bussell, *The Art of Television*, p.56

⁵⁹ Bussell, *The Art of Television*, pp.60-61

Bussell recognised the difference between presenting a naturalistic play and a fantastic one, and also recognised that the audience would understand the difference and would accept differences in presentation and direction depending upon the level of realism appropriate to the production. By mixing between groups of characters according to the demands of plot and dialogue rather than using continuity editing to provide the viewer with a spatio-temporal map of the physical relationships between different characters, Bussell moved away from both classical narrative cinema and theatre in an attempt to develop a more televisual style. Again, it is unclear whether he is referring to both of his *R.U.R.* productions or just one of them, but the attempt to develop a style peculiar to fantastic television is clear, while adding further support to Jacobs' argument that "television drama producers were actively engaged with the formal and stylistic possibilities of the new medium, rather than slavishly relaying West End theatre performances".⁶⁰ This technique in particular would have worked to emphasise the themes of the piece that were expressed through the dialogue, although it would also have reduced some of the other opportunities to suggest these themes through the physical placement and interaction of characters.

The 1948 production of *R.U.R.* has left a couple of pieces of visual evidence which provide for exploration of the piece and how it was perceived. Firstly, there is a *Radio Times* article on the production which has accompanying artwork which depicts the ranks of dead-eyed, near-identical robots, together with towering electrical pylons and test tubes, symbolising science and industry, as shown by the logo of the company R.U.R. (Figure 3). The flower in the open hand is another clear symbol of human control over nature, which is fragile and easily crushed and here seems imprisoned behind the bars of the lines which make up the factory and disappear towards the vanishing point, balanced with the seemingly endless line of robots. This usage of illustration guides the potential viewer into assessing what sort of play this might be, guiding their understanding and expectations, in this case suggesting that the play will have a technical, possibly futuristic aspect, so is likely to be fantastical in theme and so may not be presented in a realistic fashion.

⁶⁰ Jacobs, *The Intimate Screen*, p.51

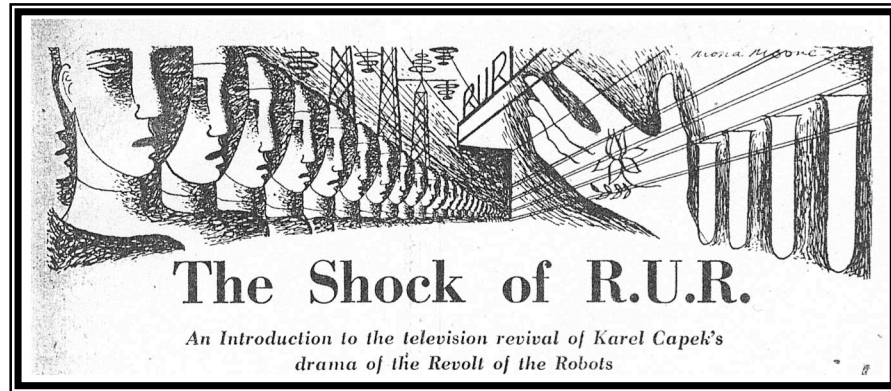


Figure 3: Radio Times, 27 February 1948

The Listener also carried a picture from the production of *R.U.R.* in its 1st April 1948 issue (Figure 4). The photograph was probably taken by an on-set photographer, so does not represent what the camera would have seen directly, but it does give an idea of one of the sets and also of the appearance of the robots in this production, as the still shows Radius, here played by Patrick Troughton, in a triumphant pose with the four robot extras marching around him. This confirms the memo from Bussell to Wardrobe dated 4 February 1948 establishing the costumes for the robots as breeches and open shirt, with a helmet and shoulder plate to put over later for Marius, Radius and Primus. Other robots wore black loin cloths, sandals, helmets and shoulder plates, except Sulla, a robot secretary who is mistaken for a human by Helena on her initial arrival, who wore “simple but realistic modern clothes”, and the robot Helena, who wore a “long white Grecian robe”.⁶¹

⁶¹ BBC WAC, T5/443, TV Drama, RUR 1937-1948



Figure 4: R.U.R. 1948 television production

The bare-chested, bare-footed appearance of the background robots emphasises the apparent fragility of flesh, while their actions and the description of the robots' physical capabilities contained within the play show their power. Their nakedness is a display and a signifier of their physicality, of a body which, unlike a normal human one, needs no protective coverings. This echoes the display of the "physically fit, battle-ready youth"⁶² in Classical Greek art, one whose display of athleticism shows "readiness to engage in physical aggression or to prevent altercation".⁶³ This would again be echoed in the display of Schwarzenegger's naked body in each of the *Terminator* films, where the point is emphasised by a scene in which he remains unconcernedly naked while enacting violence upon and receiving violence from others before taking their clothes as camouflage. This gendered but non-sexual (possible individual audience responses apart) display of flesh emphasises the non-human nature of the robots in *R.U.R.* as it does the figure of the Terminator, particularly when considered in terms of the social mores of 1948 England. Taken along with the Grecian robe of the robot Helena, this suggests a

⁶² Rubinstein, Ruth P., *Dress Codes: Meanings and Messages in American Culture* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1995) p.157

⁶³ Rubinstein, *Dress Codes*, p.186

possible Classical influence to the styling of the robots in this production, rather than a mechanical or technological one as found in the 1938 production, making them decorative or mythical rather than industrial figures.

This spectacle of flesh also simultaneously acts as a reminder of the idea of the worker as victim of economic and social forces which is part of *R.U.R.*. This dual-purpose in the image makes Franz Rottensteiner's view of Čapek's work flesh:

As a spokesman for and sympathizer with the common people, Capek [sic.] saw human individualism threatened, on the one hand, by the dehumanizing processes of industry and the political and economical forces behind it; and on the other hand, by the masses of part-slave, part-potential supermen reaching for power, that modern industry was creating. His robots and newts are symbols for very real forces in human society; efficient, anonymous, mechanical forces, crushing human individuality and human feeling.⁶⁴

The robots are themselves victims, made to work, all opportunity for joy, emotion, recreation denied them, while humans are left to a life of leisure. The humans presented in the play are specifically middle-class professionals: managers, scientists, accountants and academics, or the decorative, interfering daughter of an academic, Helena. But the robots are also a threat, and pitying them, as Helena does, and broadening their horizons means that they may realise not only that they do not have freedom, but also what they do have: control of the means of production and the physical power to strike back against their oppressors.

The final scene, which the reviewer for *The Times* felt to be so out of place, offers a hope for the robots, the workers ("robota" being Czech for drudgery or forced labour) after the revolution and the destruction of the middle classes. However, it does so in a recreation of the life of middle-class leisure that the human dominators had previously lived, with the "Eve" of the robot couple being a literal robotic duplicate of Helena. This was the woman whose actions and whose sympathy with the robots led to the end of both humans and of the majority of the robots, built with a limited life span which they lacked the knowledge to extend without their human creators, like the replicants of *BladeRunner*. The ending could be hopeful, but it could also represent the whole cycle starting again.

⁶⁴ Rottensteiner, Franz, "European science fiction" in Patrick Parrinder, *Science Fiction: A critical guide* (London: Longman, 1979) pp.215-216

The two productions of *R.U.R.* outlined here represented opportunities for the BBC Television Service to experiment with the possibilities of the medium through drama. The play these productions were based on brought with it popularity and familiarity from the theatre and an association with other Modernist, “high culture” texts. However, these associations and the experimental aspects of the presentation of the adaptations meant that this was exactly the sort of production which would not appeal to an audience perceived to have “remarkably low dramatic tastes – which may be largely due to the fact that many of them have had little or no experience of the living theatre.”⁶⁵ Based on these assumptions of the audience, a form of television drama different from the interpretive superimpositions and impact-based editing of Jan Bussell was required.

⁶⁵ Val Gielgud, 1950, quoted in Wheatley, Helen, *Gothic Television* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007) p.31

Chapter Two:

Experiments in Form: *The Time Machine* and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and the Development of the Intimate Screen

At the beginning of the BBC television service, the general attitude was that the medium was best suited to the relay of events happening at that moment somewhere else into the home. As T.H.Pear had it, in a response to the start of British television:

In sightless broadcasting, we listen to real people doing things now; television adds 'here' to the now. [...] The feeling that, though still at home, one is looking at, as well as listening to, important events, will excite many who for various reasons cannot move away from dull surroundings.¹

However, the introduction of drama to the television schedules meant that, while the viewer may have been watching people performing somewhere else, they were also watching representations of something that was happening in a place and time other than the here and now of the performance space or the home. Director of Television Gerald Cock stated that "I believe viewers would rather see an actual scene of a rush hour at Oxford Circus directly transmitted to them than the latest in film musicals".² The introduction of telefantasy could be seen as a step even further away from the conceptualisation of television as transmitting what is happening somewhere else now, as it shows utopias and uchronias, neverwheres and neverwhens. Due to this characteristic of telefantasy, it provides a site for experimentation with the techniques and form of the medium, "the showcasing of production innovations" which Helen Wheatley has associated with the Gothic genre on television.³

With an audience composed almost entirely of the well-off, metropolitan middle class,⁴ the pre-war Television Service seems to have been more comfortable

¹ Pear, T.H., "What Television Offers Us Today", *The Listener*, 11 November 1938

² Quoted in Caughie, John, "Before the Golden Age: Early Television Drama" in John Corner (ed.), *Critical Ideas in Television Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p.23

³ Wheatley, Helen, *Gothic Television* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007) p.23

⁴ This is illustrated by the response to a 1937 BBC enquiry into *Viewers and the Television Service*, which asked for opinions on programming. Nearly 12% of respondents provided unfavourable comments on studio demonstrations and talks, with "Disapproval concentrated largely upon

with this sort of experimentation than it would become in later years. In part, this seems to be connected to an explicit desire within the Service to establish an identity for television that would separate it from radio, film and the theatre and make the most of the technical and formal differences inherent in the system. As the Deputy Director-General of the BBC noted regarding the launch of the Television Service, “we do not pretend to have passed the experimental stage. Our engineers are still learning and so are the men and women responsible for the creative work of planning and performing programmes.”⁵ Similarly, Janet Leeper noted in a 1937 article for the *Contemporary Review*, “as yet television does not know where to borrow or what to create; it is in an artistically experimental stage.”⁶

However, there was also the desire, not to say requirement, to ensure that the audience was pleased with the programming, to ensure that the experiment with television would continue. This desire was illustrated, in part, by the early adoption of a form of viewer survey to assess the television audience, not only in their reactions to the material produced, but also to discover what sort of people were watching television, where it was being watched, where the viewers stood in economic terms, and what their levels of education were. The first viewer survey was conducted in 1937, and was a very simple affair that mainly aimed to discover how many television sets were in use in private and public settings, “to find out under what conditions the television programmes were being received” and to allow the opportunity for people to comment on individual programmes.⁷ Later, more detailed surveys were conducted in autumn 1948 and December 1950. These surveys provide an idea of the way that the audience was perceived by the BBC, as they formed the basis of BBC policy, and so give us some idea of what sort of decisions

demonstrations of cooking, washing, ironing, etc., which were condemned as of little interest to those who could afford television sets.” Listener Research Section, *Viewers and the Television Service: A Report of an Investigation of Viewers’ Opinions in January 1937*, 5 February 1937, LR/1, published at British Online Archives (http://www.britishonlinearchives.co.uk/document.php?cat=&sid=&cid=&pid=1248-R9-09&date_option=equal&page=&did=248-r9-09-01) viewed 9 February 2009, p.3

⁵ Carpendale, Charles, “The Coming of Television”, *The Radio Times Television Number*, 23 October 1936, p.5

⁶ Leeper, Janet, “Television”, *Contemporary Review*, July 1937, p.55

⁷ Listener Research Section, *Viewers and the Television Service*, p.1

were being made with regard to programme selection and the development of television aesthetics.

The Time Machine (1949)

Bussell's experimentation with the technology of television worked to produce an aesthetic that was television's alone. It rejected the way that the theatre used space and the formal realism of the dominant cinema aesthetic in an attempt to create something new which was appropriate to the new medium. Other producers, while equally interested in exploring the technical possibilities of television, were investigating how influences from other media could be used. One of these explorations of cinema's influence came with Robert Barr's 1949 production of *The Time Machine*, which used a number of techniques to expand the scope of television and enhance its illusion of realism. In doing so, it takes the route that Vivian Sobchack has argued is "[t]he major visual impulse of all SF films [...] to pictorialize the nonexistent, the strange and the totally alien - and to do so with a verisimilitude which is, at times, documentary in flavor and style. While we are invited to wonder at what we see, the films strive primarily for our belief, not our suspension of disbelief."⁸

As with the 1948 version of *R.U.R.*, images for *The Time Machine* survive from the *Radio Times* and *The Listener* which allow the consideration of visual aspects of the production. While there is no surviving production file at the BBC Written Archive Centre, they do hold the camera script for the play, which forms the basis for the following section. The press clippings files held at the BBC Written Archives centre also contain an article from the magazine *Illustrated*, which focuses on the creation of the visual effects used in the production.

The Time Machine is based on the H.G.Wells novel of 1895, in which a Victorian scientist, known only as "The Time Traveller", invents a time machine which takes him into London's future. In 802,701AD he finds the human descendants: the Eloi, pretty little creatures who live above ground and do no work, and the Morlocks, who retain intelligence and technical ability and live underground.

⁸ Sobchack, Vivian, *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2001), p.88

After a number of incidents in this time frame, the Time Traveller moves forward to the distant future of a dying earth, roughly 30 million years in the future. He then returns to his own time in order to tell his story to some friends, prepare some supplies and then return to his time machine to take another journey, from which he does not return.

This production was largely promoted by the BBC on its visual challenges, although they also made use of elements of familiarity, both of the original novel and with the actor playing the Time Traveller, Russell Napier.⁹ The first promotional piece on the production in the *Radio Times* appeared on 14th January 1949 in the “Talk of the Week” section, which was a general news and promotion column for BBC broadcasts.

Not a few people would jibe at the prospect of turning that fantastic Wellsian romance *The Time Machine* into visual entertainment. Robert Barr is one who believes that it can be done in the form of a drama-documentary and is already putting the finishing touch to his script. Most of us have read how Mr Wells made time reel past in our minds, but it is another thing to make time career forward 800,000 years on the screen, past the golden era, into the sunset of mankind, and on to the world’s end.

Barr calls this production a ‘visual experiment,’ and it is only being made possible by the most careful collaboration between him and scene designer Barry Learoyd. A new picture-script system is being used to simplify the matching and the superimposition of pre-shot film sequences and futuristic models.¹⁰

In line with the special effects fans about which Pierson writes in *Special Effects: Still in Search of Wonder*, the reader of this article is positioned as being interested in how the spectacular visuals for *The Time Machine* will be achieved. The same interest was assumed in an article for the magazine *Illustrated*, which was published the week following the production and showed how many of the effects for the production were achieved. Pre-planning and collaboration between producer and designer are emphasised by the *Radio Times* piece, including their use of a “picture-script system”, a phrase suggesting a form of storyboard. There is no question as to whether the adaptation will be faithful to the themes of Wells’ novel, nor any real

⁹ The Scanner, “Talk of the Week”, *Radio Times*, 21 January 1949, p.24

¹⁰ The Scanner, “Talk of the Week”, *Radio Times*, 14 January 1949, p.24

concern with the plotline. All of the focus is on the technical aspects of translating Wells' novel, and in particular its time travel sequence, to the screen visually.

Considering the extent to which Robert Barr, who adapted and produced, incorporated the spectacular aspects of the novel into the television script, this focus is unsurprising. A number of visual effects are used, beginning with a basic cross-fade between two identical sets, in this case of a small table bearing a lamp, with one feature being different between the sets; here, a small prototype of the time machine is shown to disappear by cross-fading from the set with the model on top of the table to an identical shot of the copy of the set without the model.¹¹ However, Barr enhances this simple camera trick by having the camera move from the faces of the cast to a close-up on the model, before cross-fading to the empty duplicate table, so the model fades from view, then cross-fading back to the main set from which the model has now been removed, with the camera then moving back to take in the cast again. If the shots were matched up correctly, then it would appear that all of this took place in one movement, without any switching of shot taking place, on the main set with the actors present.

This would be emphasised by the fact that Barr includes very few cuts in this first scene. Apart from the effects shot, the scene contains only two close-ups which are shot with another camera in the whole of an eight-page scene, the rest of which is accomplished purely with camera movement, moving from close-ups to two-shots to group shots and back again to encompass all of the action within the scene. This use of the single camera throughout the scene would have helped to mask the camera trick if it were executed accurately, having apparently shown that the scene was captured in a single shot, although any mismatch between the camera positions on the two tables would have resulted in the cross-fade standing out more in relation to the lack of other camera changes within the scene. Even then, there was a certain protection built into the script by the Time Traveller pointing out that the model appears "singularly askew",¹² relating its ability of temporal displacement to a sense of spatial displacement, so any apparent shift in the set due to a mismatch of camera angles during the cross-fade could be interpreted as a side-effect of the machine

¹¹ Barr, Robert, *The Time Machine*, Camera Script held by BBC Written Archive Centre, p.6

¹² Barr, *The Time Machine*, p.6

disappearing through time. Instead, the production crew were displacing the live perception of the viewer spatially by mixing between cameras occupying separate locations.

The time travel sequence is particularly ingenious and complex for a live production, indicating the amount of work that was put into providing the illusion of reality as part of the production. Two cameras and a telecine recording are used mixed together to provide the visuals of the time machine moving forward through time, with the laboratory seeming to dissolve away from around it and the landscape changing as the millennia pass. The three minute duration of the travel sequence also emphasises that this is something to be regarded, contemplated: it is an effects spectacle just as much as the “Star Gate” sequence in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). The following table summarises this sequence to illustrate the complexity of the production’s visuals:

Table 1: The Time Machine Time Travel Sequence

Camera 1	Camera 2	Telecine
The Time Traveller mounts the time machine		
		Clock shows time
Time Traveller moves machine forward a number of hours then stops it		
		Clock shows time
Time Traveller starts the machine moving forward through time		
		Clock hands spin faster and faster
Time Traveller on the machine		

Camera 1	Camera 2	Telecine
		“Sequence: Journey into the future. Approx 3 minutes” ¹³
	Superimpose: Time Traveller on his machine as	“the walls of his laboratory dissolve into ruins and we see beyond the buildings of the future, the sun lobbing across the sky” ¹⁴
	Remove Camera 2	Future landscape in rain
	Superimpose: Time Traveller falls into frame; CU on his face	Future landscape in rain
Mix to (from Camera 2) and superimpose (on telecine): face of monument		Take away telecine
Face of monument		

Table 2: The Time Machine Time Travel Sequence

This sequence is accompanied by two selections from Sibelius’ “Prelude to the Tempest 1:2” and various pieces of pre-recorded classical music are interspersed through the production, including a selection from Arthur Bliss’ score for the 1936 film of Wells’ *Things to Come*. The production also makes free use of pre-recorded commentary from the Time Traveller, echoing the first-person narrative of the novel, while also adding an element of time-slip. If the audience is accepted as seeing television broadcasts as a remote view of things happening somewhere else at the time of viewing, then the pre-recorded voice-over is itself a form of time travel, a blending of the time streams, as the audio time stream runs separately from the video one.

¹³ Barr, *The Time Machine*, p.11

¹⁴ Barr, *The Time Machine*, p.11

The space of the piece is opened out in a number places through the use of still pictures to provide wide shots of locations which it would not be possible to build to the appropriate scale in the studio. This also allows for the changes in location between a Victorian laboratory, the space in front of the White Sphinx in the year 802,701 and the “desolate landscape”¹⁵ of the far future. The script also calls for the expansion of the space of the production vertically, rather than horizontally, by including a sequence where the Time Traveller descends a shaft, encountering Morlocks underground and fleeing back to the surface. Once again, the shots were carefully marshalled in order to give the impression that this was a continuous set, although a close examination of the camera script suggests that there was time for the necessary movement between sets. This enhancement of the spatial aspect of the production was further enhanced by the inclusion of a telecine shot of the glowing eyes of the Morlocks, alleviating the need for this effect to be created on stage. Telecine is further employed to provide effects in the form of superimposed rain and fire, once again alleviating the burden on creating live effects, and for a further time travel sequence as the Time Traveller moves further towards the end of the world, where he is menaced by “1 crab’s claw. Practical, and as large as possible.”¹⁶ This is followed by a scene of the slow death of the planet, the sun going down for the last time and eternal snow settling through use of telecine superimposed on a dark soundstage.¹⁷

Where Bussell used his effects, including his editing choices, in a non-realistic fashion that emphasised what he saw as the demands of the situation and the possibilities of television, Barr used effects to expand the setting in a fairly realistic mode.¹⁸ His use of establishing long shots suggests a cinematic influence, even though he was utilising stills placed in front of a caption camera rather than moving pictures of an actual location. The number of locations used also suggests that Barr was interested in showing that television could handle the spatial scope of the

¹⁵ Barr, *The Time Machine*, p.26

¹⁶ Barr, *The Time Machine*, p.iii

¹⁷ Barr, *The Time Machine*, p.28

¹⁸ This is also what Rudolph Cartier is credited with being innovative in doing when he began working with the BBC in the early 1950s. This challenge to Cartier’s claims to innovation will be discussed in Section Three.

production as well as its concepts. Indeed, the sequence where the Time Traveller descends the vertical shaft, encounters Morlocks and heads back up the shaft to safety has no real narrative function, but simply shows the expansion of the piece vertically, breaking it away from the perceived restrictions of television.

As noted with regard to *R.U.R.*, Bussell believed that “Film and television are quite different media and to borrow is a confession of weakness.”¹⁹ Barr’s production of *The Time Machine* shows that he was at least willing to experiment with the alternative, to use expansive illusions that were perhaps more familiar from the cinema. Rather than the interpretative imagery that Bussell favoured, Barr employed realism where possible, bringing his fantastic drama closer to the reality of an outside broadcast, which could employ wider vistas, and the illusion of showing something that was actually happening at that time in a distant place to the viewer at home. In doing so he expanded the way that “Live television gives the audience access to an ‘other’ space and also to an alternative time: the viewer’s present and the present experience of others in a distant place are equivalent but different”.²⁰ Barr simply took this existing spatial and temporal displacement and extended it. Bussell, on the other hand, clearly perceives the more important and more engaging aspect of television to be its intimacy and its capability of showing things which are not realistic but which provide other aesthetic and intellectual engagements in a similar way to that of the inherently non-realistic performance in a theatre.

Yet both were experimenting, and both faced criticism for their experiments. The review from *The Times* for Bussell’s 1938 production of *R.U.R.* found fault with the adaptation and the superimposition effect. Barr received criticism from the readers of the *Radio Times*; of three letters regarding *The Time Machine* published in the 4th February 1949 edition, one offered no criticism, one was generally positive and only complained that “the noises in the studio during the showing very nearly spoilt the whole performance”, while the third offered a completely negative appraisal:

Must we be afflicted with a repeat of *The Time Machine*? Surely, there are no viewers who want to see it a second time. Am I so lacking in

¹⁹ Bussell, Jan, *The Art of Television* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952) p.55

²⁰ Bignell, Jonathan, *Introduction to Television Studies* (London: Routledge, 2004) pp.192-193

intelligence that I could not appreciate the fantasy? It was so weird and impossible I could not get the least bit interested in it and felt quite relieved when it was over.²¹

A fourth letter was published a week later, saying, “*The Time Machine* was produced with remarkable ingenuity and there was some very good acting by Russell Napier, but wasn’t it rather short? Surely it could have gone on for the other half-hour.”²²

What is interesting about these letters is that they engage with the play in a way different from the discourse of visual experimentation established by the articles in the *Radio Times*. While G. Wingate recognised the “remarkable ingenuity” of the production, and the noises off that also troubled the 1938 *R.U.R.* are mentioned, the letters otherwise refer purely to enjoyment without regard to whether the visual experiments of the production were a success. This despite the promotion of the production as a “visual experiment” in the “Talk of the Week” section on 14th January, as a series of problems in an article to accompany the broadcast,²³ and as an “Experiment with Wells” in the “Talk of the Week” for the second performance.²⁴ While it may seem unfair to expect a viewers’ letters column to extend to a discussion of the success of such an experiment in techniques, the *Radio Times* letters column regularly contained letters praising or criticising technical matters. For example, of ten letters published in the 25th February 1949 issue, one praised the new cameras in use for outside broadcasts²⁵ while another criticised the frequency of change of camera angles during the variety show *Café Continental*,²⁶ a complaint that was followed up by a letter (one of only five in that issue) from a former television producer explaining why that technique might have been used.²⁷ The *Radio Times* also had regular articles on technical developments in television, and new techniques being experimented with in upcoming productions.

²¹ Wrench, A.G., “Viewers Are Saying”, *Radio Times*, 4 February 1949, p.25; the two other letters are from Mrs Gladys Hemming and A.R.Leman respectively.

²² Wingate, G., “Viewers Are Saying”, *Radio Times*, 11 February 1949, p.25

²³ Swift, John, “To the World’s End in Sixty Minutes”, *Radio Times*, 21 January 1949, p.25

²⁴ The Scanner, “Talk of the Week”, *Radio Times*, 4 February 1949, p.24

²⁵ Timmins, S., “Viewers Are Saying”, 25 February 1949, p.33

²⁶ Halls, F.W., “Viewers Are Saying”, 25 February 1949, p.33

²⁷ Irwin, John, “Viewers Are Saying”, 15 April 1949, p.29

If the readers of the *Radio Times* were capable of engaging with the technical issues of a production but chose not to, even though the production was highly technical, it can be assumed that the technical aspects of the broadcast were of less interest than the narrative. A.G. Wrench's complaint about the play being "weird and impossible" suggests that the nature of the piece as a fantasy was a key consideration in their assessment of the production. This is the same reaction as Michelle Pierson has noted amongst non-fans in relation to *kaijū eiga*, where the lack of realism in the images that formed the films provoked a negative response regardless of their appropriateness to the fantastic narrative.²⁸ Yet the matters of appropriateness of style and success in expanding the spatial and temporal horizons of television do not arise.

This suggests that the style was accepted, that an essentially realist, representational style was seen as appropriate to television, in line with its frequently-stated purpose as a documentary relay of events happening elsewhere into the home. This accords with the statement already quoted from the "Talk of the Week" item for 14th January 1949 which states that Barr decided to take a "drama-documentary" approach to the play. "Drama-documentary" does not here imply a drama using the form of a documentary, but one that attempts a representational style in line with factual programming which relays events, with even the time-slip apparatus of the Time Traveller's voice-over finding its equivalent in a voice-over from a commentator to a live event. This is also a reflection of the documentary impulse that Vivian Sobchack noted as a drive behind science fiction film imagery, where the need to create belief in the fantastic narrative, situations and settings depicted leads to a drive for verisimilitude.²⁹ Barr's approach to science fiction production was clearly more in line with this than was Bussell's, which utilised the non-realistic in a way closer to that which Pierson notes in the *kaijū eiga*.

Despite rejecting the restrictions of live television embraced by Bussell, Barr produced a broadcast with the appearance of a live relay, and the programme was accepted as such by the audience. This experiment in mixing film and live

²⁸ Pierson, Michelle, *Special Effects: Still in Search of Wonder* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) p.73

²⁹ Sobchack, *Screening Space*, p.88

performance wasn't entirely new: Maurice Gorham noted that "In the pre-War B.B.C. Television Service it was common practice to shoot linking scenes, exteriors and effects on film and mix them into live production".³⁰ However, it was to increasingly become the practice, as Val Gielgud suggested in a piece regarding his impending assumption of the role of Head of BBC Drama at the end of 1949:

The Television cameras – and let us by no means forget the microphones – can in fact present drama in a new way to a new audience. They can go not only inside the boot cupboard. They can go inside the mind. They can incorporate film background and film linking shots to achieve a breadth and continuity unimaginable in the theatre; they can simultaneously keep the vitality and intelligence of continuous performance which give the live theatre its immense advantage over any film however cunningly it may be canned.³¹

Bussell's ideal of remaining within the limitations of live television without any recording assistance was, to a large extent, abandoned, and the idea of what television drama should be now followed Barr's model. Regardless of responses to *The Time Machine* itself, the experiment was a success.

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (1950)

The attempt at following a realist, documentary style with *The Time Machine* reflected the growing importance of this as the established aesthetic of television drama. The adoption of this aesthetic as *the* accepted approach to drama was shown by the adaptation in 1950 of a classic of science fiction horror. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was produced by the BBC Television Service as one of two plays marking the centenary of the birth of Robert Louis Stevenson. The other play was an adaptation of a stage biographical drama called *Tusitala*. There is no production file retained at the BBC Written Archives Centre for *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, only a script, but the preview of the play from the *Radio Times* drama critic Lionel Hale suggests why this, out of all of Stevenson's gripping narratives, should have been chosen for adaptation to mark his centenary:

The saintly Jekyll and the diabolical Hyde, inhabiting one body by turns, are a wonderful melodramatic invention; and John Keir Cross's adaptation for television should catch, by the trick-work of the camera, all the theatrical

³⁰ Gorham, Maurice, "Restarting Television", *B.B.C. Quarterly*, Vol.1, No.1, April 1946, p.14

³¹ Gielgud, Val, "The Possibilities of Television", *Radio Times*, 20 December 1949, p.11

effects of Jekyll dissolving into Hyde and back again, and the drama of good and evil played out against the background of Victorian London. But the allegory is all there, for those who wish to see it.³²

Not only was this play based on a popular, well-known text, but it also offered an allegorical reading for those who cared for such things, and an opportunity to utilise some of the technical advantages of television in its trick-work. The production should therefore have broad appeal across a range of audiences of differing tastes.

While the newspaper reviews of this production held at the BBC Written Archives Centre are not unanimous in their opinion, the majority treat the drama favourably. *The Daily Graphic* praised it as “more realistic than the stage or film version of the same story”³³ while an otherwise hostile notice from J.Stubbs Walker in *The Daily Mail* did conclude by congratulating producer Fred O’Donovan “on handling the changes of personality, which were done most effectively by camera mixes and the use of close-focus work which gave a grim reality to the story.”³⁴ This emphasis on realism and reality as a core aspect of the success of such an obviously fantastic production once again illustrates the importance of realism to the wider audience. The newspaper reviews look for and praise technical achievement, and note O’Donovan’s signature technique of using only one camera to each scene, showing that there was still an interest in televisual style like that shown around *The Time Machine*. However, the interest seems to have moved away from a general interest in how this new medium works and what it is possible to achieve with it and on to a greater concern about the effect of the technical achievements on the end result as a piece of drama.

The camera script includes a speech to be delivered by the announcer before the play proper begins. This speech states that:

The story as we now present it is based on the book as the author wrote it – has no connection to any of the film or stage versions which have appeared from time to time. The structure has had to be altered for purely dramatic

³² Hale, Lionel, “Homage to ‘Tusitala’”, *Radio Times*, 10 November 1950, p.40

³³ Anon., “Horror Play Chills on TV”, *Daily Graphic*, 15 November 1950

³⁴ Walker, J.Stubbs, “Looking and Listening”, *The Daily Mail*, 15 November 1950

purposes; but this is the tale in its essence as it first formed itself in the mind of its creator.³⁵

Despite this return to the source novel, the play does take one major liberty with the structure of the novel, beyond integrating its multiple first-person narratives into a dramatic whole. Following the announcer's introduction and the title card, a transformation scene from Jekyll to Hyde is immediately played out, making a potentially spectacular beginning to grip the audience. One possible way of handling this scene would be a simple cross-fade between duplicate sets, as used by Robert Barr for the disappearing model time machine. Another method of producing an in-camera transformation would be to use the technique used by Richard Mansfield in his 1887 stage adaptation of the novel, who, "by the use of coloured lights and make-up – especially magenta reflected on to green, with gells [sic] being slowly introduced to the electric lights [...] managed to change the shape of his face."³⁶ Such a transformation would have been particularly easy to handle, as the black and white camera would pick up the changes in tone as the colours of lighting and makeup interacted. Instead, Cross chose to have Jekyll take the potion, the camera to pan away while Alan Judd, playing Jekyll, stepped away and Desmond Llewellyn, playing Hyde, stepped into his place, then the camera panned back to reveal Hyde.³⁷ Other on-camera transformations are handled using duplicate sets, in one case taking place during a flashback narrated by Jekyll, through the use of a pre-recorded voice over,³⁸ or by a similar substitution while the camera is focussed elsewhere.

So why use this technique, when the coloured make-up and lighting technique would have saved the building of duplicate sets, accurate lining-up of shots and the cost of hiring a separate actor to play Hyde? This choice actually brings the television production closer to the book, where Jekyll and Hyde do not just look different, but are even different sizes. It also differentiates the production from the films and stage plays which had followed Richard Mansfield's lead and had both roles played by the same actor. The key motivation here is differentiating

³⁵ Cross, John Keir, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Camera script held by BBC Written Archives Centre, unpaginated

³⁶ Frayling, Christopher, *Nightmare: The Birth of Horror* (London: BBC Books, 1996) p.154

³⁷ Cross, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, p.1

³⁸ Cross, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, p.35

television from these other media, while also allowing for the claim of being more authentic to the original text than these other adaptations. This also connects with the idea of television as a documentary medium, showing what is happening somewhere else, a particularly appropriate idea for the adaptation of a novel which is itself documentary, in that its story depends upon three narratives by different characters which document and illuminate the same set of events.

The camerawork required by the camera script for *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* also supports this engagement with the first-person documentation that formed the original novel by providing a first-person involvement at one point. When Utterson relates his first encounter with Hyde, the script notes that “The camera has become Utterson”³⁹ and it retains this first-person point of view throughout the encounter with Hyde, breaking into a third person view when Utterson is invited into Jekyll’s house and walks past the camera, leading into a new scene. A brief, pre-recorded voice-over⁴⁰ leads into the first-person sequence, allowing for Jack Livesey, playing Utterson, to cross the studio to take up position behind the camera which will shoot the next scene. The voice-over provides his thoughts, his intention to encounter Hyde, then the actor provides Utterson’s live dialogue with Hyde and then Jekyll within the following scene.

The purpose of the point of view camerawork is to give more impact to the first full view of Hyde’s face, as only his profile and hairy hands were seen in the opening transformation, by engaging directly with the intimate nature of television and its particular affinity with the close-up. As Bussell notes:

The television close-up, however, normally shows things approximately actual size, and there is nothing unpleasant or unnatural in a television close-up of a face. The artist is brought to your fireside just the size he would be if he were really sitting there.⁴¹

The shock of introducing an “approximately actual size” Hyde into the viewer’s living room, looking directly at them, “live” drew upon all of the intimacy of television in order to engage directly with the viewer at a base “shock” level. While the original mystery of the novel, the connection between Jekyll and Hyde, was

³⁹ Cross, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, p.15

⁴⁰ Cross, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, p.14

⁴¹ Bussell, *The Art of Television*, p.20

irretrievably lost from any attempt at a direct adaptation, the use of such television techniques to draw the viewer into the narrative helped to overcome the over-familiarity of the narrative and to return some of the horror of the original novel. The story's translation to television means that its scares will be dominated by the visual horror rather than the speculative terror, according to Stephen King's definitions:

The finest emotion is terror [...] It's what the mind sees [...] It is the unpleasant speculation called to mind.

[...] horror [is] that emotion of fear that underlies terror, an emotion which is slightly less fine, because it is not entirely of the mind. Horror also invites a physical reaction by showing us something which is physically wrong.⁴²

However, the sustained concealment of Hyde's appearance up to and in this scene serves to build terror, which is released through horror when Hyde, who keeps turned away from Utterson while they talk, suddenly turns to reveal his face in a classic shock moment.

This reliance on the intimacy of the medium for effect can be interpreted as placing *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* more closely into the horror genre than science fiction, as it concentrates on the effect on the individual rather than the effect on society. This view would follow Vivian Sobchack's differentiation of the two closely related genres:

The horror film is primarily concerned with the individual in conflict with society or with some extension of himself, the SF film with society and its institutions in conflict with each other or with some alien other.⁴³

Not only do the transformation scenes and the first-person camerawork focus on the individual, but Jekyll is certainly in conflict with an aspect of himself.

However, regardless of this question of genre, the focus on the intimate nature of television expressed through the particular effects in this production also suggests the decline in experimentation as described by Jason Jacobs:

The critical assumptions about television drama production and criticism in the 1930s and 1940s were similar, but at that time drama production was still seen as exploratory, drawing upon a range of styles that meant that the uncertainty of "somewhere between them all" was also a permission to draw upon a range of stylistic and thematic choices from radio, theatre, film and

⁴² King, Stephen, *Danse Macabre* (London: Warner, 1991) p.36

⁴³ Sobchack, *Screening Space*, pp.29-30

literature. By the 1950s critical thinking set around the proscriptive formulation of the “intimate screen” threatened to close down stylistic experiment and thematic range in television drama.⁴⁴

This association is supported by the praise that Val Gielgud gave to *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* in an article for the *Radio Times* on the television drama of 1950. As his period as Head of Drama started with that year, his inclusion of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* in his list of “the television plays that I remember as most significant in 1950”⁴⁵ associates it with his drive for television drama to move from its period of experimentation. He wrote, “The time for established professional standards has arrived, and must be recognised, acknowledged, and faced, with all its implications.”⁴⁶ This establishment of standards would discourage the experimentation with form that Bussell and Barr had conducted, focussing producers onto the concept of intimacy, and it is this standardisation which Nigel Kneale and Rudolph Cartier would come to rebel against.

Conclusion

The use of effects in science fiction productions on early British television was part of the engagement of drama producers with the wider question of what form television should take. For some, the opportunities of these early years led them to non-realistic forms, as with Bussell’s utilisation of superimposition and his “Punch and Judy” technique, focussing on the interaction of the characters separate from their environment. For others, such as Barr, the ability to mix telecine, prerecorded sound and still images with the live performance provided them with the opportunity to show how the restricted space of the television studio could be opened up spatially and temporally, expanding the possibilities of storytelling. Yet the idea of the intimacy of the television drama persisted and developed into the norm, with effects being employed which exploited and enhanced that intimacy to make a greater connection to the audience and to enhance the idea of realism, albeit a

⁴⁴ Jacobs, Jason, *The Intimate Screen: Early British Television Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p.124

⁴⁵ Gielgud, Val, “Drama on the Television Screen”, *Radio Times*, 12 January 1951, p.5

⁴⁶ Gielgud, “Drama on the Television Screen”, p.5

realism which occasionally, as in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, requires the acceptance of a single fantastic premise. Such a situation is also one of the standards of science fiction, where a particular change, a novum in the formulation of science fiction critic Darko Suvin, is extrapolated to provide the environment and, usually, the narrative drive of the fiction. The similarity of these requirements shows the suitability of early television to the handling of at least certain kinds of science fictional material.

The move away from experimental use of the visual aspect of television towards a more realistic, “documentary” style happens at a time when the television audience is changing and the BBC’s monopoly comes realistically under threat for the first time. The BBC’s charter was due to expire at the end of 1951, and a Broadcasting Committee under Lord Beveridge was established in 1949 to consider the future of British broadcasting, opening up the possibility of competition for the first time, or for the BBC to be turned into a commercial operation. While the report ultimately recommended that the BBC retain the monopoly over British broadcasting, it also stated that:

self-criticism should be a function of the broadcasting authority as vital as is the production of broadcasts. The report proposes that to perform this function a new service to be known as the Public Representation Service should be set up within the BBC. This would include the existing research into the reaction of audiences. It would also report on criticism from outside and make a systematic review of Home and Overseas programmes.⁴⁷

This majority report was accompanied by a minority report from Selwyn Lloyd, M.P., recommending that the BBC monopoly be abolished. In either case, whether due to Governmental edict or by means of competition, the BBC had to consider the needs and tastes of its audiences to a greater degree than before.

In the April 1949 issue of the *Film Monthly Review*, Robert Macdermot, the Head of Television Drama, declared that “it has been my policy to try to offer something for everyone while declining to be tied down completely to the Lowest Common Denominator of ‘commercial’ plays.”⁴⁸ Yet it appears that Macdermot was not talking about the formal originality of productions as much as their familiarity

⁴⁷ Anon., “Report of the Broadcasting Committee”, *Radio Times*, 26 January 1951, p.5

⁴⁸ Macdermot, Robert, “Television Drama”, *Film Monthly Review*, April 1949, p.11

from the stage. The concerns with the difficulty of programming in relation to the audience's desires were also raised by Max Beloff in an article entitled "Broadcasting and Twentieth-Century Civilisation" in a 1952 issue of *BBC Quarterly*. Beloff asked, "To what extent, in a democracy, is it permissible to give one's helpless, or more or less helpless, audience tougher artistic matter to digest than they would ask for unguided, in the hope that thereby the general level of taste may ultimately be raised?"⁴⁹

Beloff's question appeared in the same issue of the journal in which the BBC reported the results of its audience research enquiries in autumn 1948 and December 1950. This report showed that television had been rapidly taken up across the social spectrum and that it was rapidly spreading "downwards" through social and financial groupings. The enquiries also revealed that "given two neighbouring families of broadly similar economic status but of differing educational levels, it is the family where the educational level is the lower which is likely to acquire a television set first."⁵⁰ Furthermore, it showed "that the 'lower' groups tend to view more than the 'higher'."⁵¹

Partly this was due to the expansion of the television service, which, "In 1949 [...] was extended to the West Midlands, in 1951 to Manchester, and in the following year parts of Scotland, Wales and the West were covered."⁵² As television sets were now affordable by more people anyway, the expansion of the service simply meant that the viewing public could be even more representative of the general British public than when it was limited to those within "about twenty-five miles of Alexandra Palace."⁵³ This realisation that an increasing number of the audience were not of the "cultured" elite of London would lead the television service further down the path of realism and a documentary style, producing what John Corner calls "aesthetics of the everyday", where "the realist commitments of various

⁴⁹ Beloff, Max, "Broadcasting and Twentieth-Century Civilisation" in *BBC Quarterly*, Vol VII, No 1, Spring 1952, p.20

⁵⁰ Silvey, Robert, "Viewers, Viewing and Leisure", *BBC Quarterly*, Vol VII, No 1, Spring 1952, p.33

⁵¹ Silvey, "Viewers, Viewing and Leisure", p.36

⁵² Crisell, Andrew, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London: Routledge, 2002) p.79

⁵³ Carpendale, Charles, "The Coming of Television", *The Radio Times Television Number*, 23 October 1936, p.5

types of reportage have combined with the thematic and formal realism of the soaps (with their dominant focus on working-class living)”.⁵⁴ Such a view of the audience for television may well have contributed to the desire to avoid more formally experimental work, based on the argument that the audience would be unfamiliar with it, unwilling to engage with it, and even unable to understand it.

The possible correctness of this view is suggested, although from a different place and time, by some of Pierre Bourdieu’s research, which led him to note that:

when formal experimentation insinuates itself into their familiar environments [...] working-class viewers protest, not only because they do not feel the need for these fancy games, but because they sometimes understand that they derive their necessity from the logic of a field of production which excludes them precisely by these games [...].⁵⁵

As the BBC Television Service was trying to be inclusive, it could not risk the exclusion of a part of its viewing public, particularly the part that was growing most rapidly. They clearly identified the possibility that viewers might protest at more formal experimentation, not least because they were protesting, through letters to the BBC and the *Radio Times*, and by the proxy, however unreliable, of the television reviewers in the press.

So if the “weird and impossible” were unsuitable for the general audience, then the retreat to realism was the only option. Of course, this was essentially a return to that early conception of television as providing a relay, which Jonathan Bignell has argued “conditioned the makers of television to think of the medium in terms of realism, since television would reflect society to itself in the present.”⁵⁶ Only now the relay was more strongly established as a relay of drama in a particular style. That style boasted the liveness of theatre alongside the ability to bring the performers into close-up that the cinema had. In fact, the close-up was seen as the key feature of television, providing a focus on the actor rather than the setting, with the liveness of the medium showing a complete, coherent performance rather than

⁵⁴ Corner, John, *Critical Ideas in Television Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p.31

⁵⁵ Bourdieu, Pierre (trans. Richard Nice), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984) pp.32-34

⁵⁶ Bignell, *Introduction to Television Studies*, p.28

one composed, as in film, from many small, brief instances of performance shot separately and out of narrative order.

It could be argued that this style of production was one which was derived purely from the technological restrictions of early television. While there is a certain truth in this, Britain's earliest telefantasy productions show how the same technology could be used in different ways, using the suggestive aspect of low-definition, small screens to engage with the audience's imagination. Bussell's "Punch and Judy" technique showed that the style of framing and cutting shots need not be one which followed the predominant cinema aesthetic of a master shot to establish the relative positions of characters in the scene followed by close-ups. Barr's *The Time Machine* may not have achieved all that it set out to do, but it illustrated the ways that different techniques could be mixed within a production in order to expand the setting outside of the limitations of the television studio.

Experimentation with the possibilities of television form and technology obviously did not stop. However, they tended to move away from drama and into the field of light entertainment, where particular techniques could be tested in relation to a single performance. So back projection was tested first in *Here's Howard*, *The Passing Show* and *Children's Hour* before being used to provide scenery for drama in 1952,⁵⁷ when the reviewer for *The Listener* noted that the results had "something of a natural verisimilitude."⁵⁸ This shows that ideas of realism in drama were still foremost in at least one reviewer's mind. Experiments with integrating two moving images were conducted by having some dancers appear on the top of the piano alongside Muffin the Mule.

Where television had begun by embracing its experimental nature, by the start of the 1950s it was all too aware of its role as part of the wider culture, serving the British public. And the responsibility of that role led to the end of a freedom to embrace the unreal as unreal, replaced by a drive towards realism. Even when depicting things which were not real, they had to be depicted in such a way that they could be accepted as having a reality. Television was no longer for experimentation,

⁵⁷ Anon., "Helping the Scene Designer", *Radio Times*, 29 June 1951, p.40

⁵⁸ Anon., "Critic on the Hearth", *The Listener*, 23 October 1952, p.694

it was for the people, and the people were understood as demanding their unreal as real as it could be.

Section Two: The Development of Genre

Having examined the development of realism as the dominant aesthetic in British television as illustrated by early science fiction programming, I am now going to examine the development of “science fiction” as an acknowledged genre in Britain. This will involve stepping back slightly to consider two dramas that fit chronologically before *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: Take Back Your Freedom* (1948) and *Summer Day’s Dream* (1949). This section also moves forward through the chronology, considering *Stranger From Space* (1951-3), *No Smoking!* (1952), *Mystery Story* (1952) and *Number Three* (1953). Taken alongside the productions covered in **Section One**, these dramas show the diversity of early science fiction programming in Britain, emphasising that there are issues around grouping these programmes together under the label “science fiction”, and returning to the question of identifying whether or not individual texts can be said to belong to a particular genre. However, the process of identifying productions with a genre called “science fiction” **did** begin in the early 1950s, and the BBC’s reaction to and use of genre labels during this period is considered in **The BBC Versus Science Fiction: Acceptance and Opposition in Genre Terms**.

This section is concerned with genrification, which here refers to the process by which the genre “science fiction” became accepted within the BBC, and the ways that this process affected the dramas produced. This differs from Rick Altman’s definition of the process of genrification as the way that “genres [are] formed when adjectives become nouns”.¹ In other words, the way that films which were described as “musical” because they contained a large proportion of or strong focus on songs and tunes became referred to as “musicals”, or the way that “horrifying” films became “horror” films. Nevertheless, the move from broad descriptions of productions based on their associations with particular authors, such as H.G. Wells or Jules Verne, to labelling such productions as “science fiction” does follow the general movement from broadly descriptive to more specific labelling that is contained within Altman’s concept. Indeed, the process can be seen as the move

¹ Altman, Rick, *Film/Genre* (London: BFi Publishing, 1999) p.54

from an adjectival description as “Wellsian” to a noun-based description as “science fiction”.

Key features of this acceptance or rejection of genres and genre labels are the association of particular genres with particular national and cultural groups, and perceptions of the taste formations of those groups by other groups. In his history of literary science fiction, *Trillion Year Spree*, Brian Aldiss claims that the primary difference between American “Low” and European “High” science fiction lies in their base concerns: where “High” science fiction is concerned with reflecting changes in society while “Low” science fiction is more interested in the thrills of technology and imagining the alien. His summary of the origins of these differences in the 1930s provides a key to the concerns of this section:

SF’s tonic schizophrenia is in evidence in the Thirties. High SF is full of *zeitgeist*, mirroring uneasily the forthcoming global conflict with all its lost store of lives. Low SF dabbles contentedly in the marvels of technology and the purple things that loom beyond the Beyond.

This division echoes a division of experience which existed between writers of American and British science fiction.

As we have seen, different traditions had developed between the two countries. The scientific romance, which enjoyed its heyday in the works of Shiel, Griffith and H.G.Wells, was shortly to merge with the science fiction of the SF magazines. Its traditions had been weakened by the World War of 1914-18, and by the shrinkage of the world.

Its appeal, though limited, had always been to an intelligent middle-class audience.

American science fiction came from different roots, appealing to simpler audiences.²

Aldiss sees a division in nationality and in target audience for his two categories of science fiction, associating American “Low” science fiction with magazine publication for less intelligent or less educated and lower class audiences than those for the more insular, novel-based scientific romance. This association of American product with less intelligent, popular audiences reflects post-War concerns regarding creeping Americanisation and its deleterious effects on British culture.

Aldiss makes a division between European “scientific romance” and American “science fiction” that appears to have been shared by the BBC during the

² Aldiss, Brian and David Wingrove, *Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction* (London: Paladin, 1988) pp.216-217

period covered by this thesis. While all of the dramas examined are acknowledged now as “science fiction”, or are at least recognisable in retrospect as being “science fiction” because of the tropes that they contain, none of them were labelled as such at the time by the BBC. Instead, the preference was to associate these productions with the European “scientific romance” genre, labelling them “Wellsian fantasy” or similar.³ This section will consider the reasons behind this preference in its second chapter, **The BBC Versus Science Fiction: Acceptance and Opposition in Genre Terms**. Before this, **Variations in Genre: Exploring the Breadth of Early British Television Science Fiction** will describe the productions from 1948 to 1953 that have not already been covered in the previous section but which are considered as science fiction for the purposes of this thesis, excluding *The Quatermass Experiment*, which will be discussed more fully in the following section.

³ The Scanners, “Talk of the Week”, *Radio Times* 4 February 1949, p.24, regarding *The Time Machine*; Čapek was referred to as “a disciple of Wells” in Swift, John, “The Shock of R.U.R.”, *Radio Times*, 27 February 1948

Chapter Three:

Variations in Genre: Exploring the Breadth of Early British Television Science Fiction

This chapter is structured around individual programmes, indicating certain connections as they occur, in order to best illustrate the diversity of these productions. There are many differences between these productions, just as there are differences between the three productions discussed in **Section One**. However, as with those three productions, there are interconnections between the programmes discussed below. The programmes are interlinked through a number of different themes which themselves typically relate to cultural concerns. There are concerns with questions of labour, of the role and identity of Britain after the war, and of the application of science and technology. It is partly these thematic connections which illustrate a generic coherence between otherwise seemingly disparate productions, but overall it is the sense of extrapolation which joins these narratives under the genre of “science fiction”.

Writing about science fiction film, Christine Cornea has noted a tendency which can also be seen as true regarding science fiction in other media:

science fiction’s rather fluid and ambivalent boundaries as a film genre meant that it could more readily commandeer elements related to other genres; it could absorb elements from other genres in order to extend its reach and appeal.¹

While Cornea is discussing the way that the science fiction blockbuster film of the 1980s was able to establish itself as a major force because of its ability to integrate elements from other genres, this comment also points to an essential characteristic of the science fiction genre across media, and one of the key concepts in considering it as a mode or a “discussion” rather than a genre. Similarly, J.P. Telotte has pointed to the “protean” nature of expressions of science fiction in film as being key to its success as well as meaning that defining “science fiction” is more difficult than

¹ Cornea, Christine, *Science Fiction Cinema: Between Fantasy and Reality* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007) p.113

defining other genres.² Similarly, Jonathan Bignell has highlighted the importance of the shifting nature of genres to television, noting that:

While genre is a way of drawing boundaries between one kind of programming and another, the television industry's perpetual search for new combinations of generic elements and the audience's skill in 'reading' genre in complex ways mean that genre boundaries are always being redrawn by viewers and programme-makers.³

This protean nature of science fiction in particular can be seen to stem, in part, from the way that the genre was originally codified by magazine editors like Gernsback and Campbell, who drew upon a range of different narratives and narrative types to define "science fiction". The range of concepts and existing types of narrative fitting into "science fiction" can be seen in the extended pre-histories of the genre that are often to be found in considerations of science fiction literature and film, which Kingsley Amis outlined as:

historians of science fiction are likely to start off with Plato and the Atlantis bits in the *Timaeus* and the *Critias*. From there they will wander forward, usually lending their account increased bulk and impressiveness by subsuming fantasy as well as science fiction under the irritating heading of 'imaginative fiction,' and taking in on the way the *Dialogues* of Pope Gregory I, the *Nibelungenlied* and *Beowulf*, the Arthurian romances, Thomas More, *Gulliver*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, *Frankenstein*, a lot about Poe, *Dracula*, Verne and Wells, arriving finally at the really climactic event, the foundation of *Amazing Stories* in 1926.⁴

This list does not include the impact of American serial writing, or non-fiction science and technology writing, which particularly informed the American science fiction magazine stories. Such disparate roots, combined with the need for development within the field of science fiction in order to develop and maintain audiences, led to the development of a number of sub-genres, some of which pre-existed the genre, such as time travel or the utopia, and some of which developed from it or were accepted into the wider genre at later dates.

The following programme descriptions examine the sub-genres into which these programmes can be seen to fall, or the reasons that they can be considered to

² Telotte, J.P., *Science Fiction Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p.9

³ Bignell, Jonathan, *An Introduction to Television Studies* (London: Routledge, 2004) p.132

⁴ Amis, Kingsley, *New Maps of Hell* (London: Four Square, 1963) pp.20-21

be science fiction. This illuminates the breadth of programming that can be considered under this label during this period, while also seeking to identify overarching concerns which suggest the importance of this genre to the period, whether it was recognised as a single genre or not at the time.

Take Back Your Freedom (1948)

Take Back Your Freedom was a Michael Barry adaptation of a play by Winifred Holtby and Norman Gunsbury, and was broadcast on 17th October 1948, thereby falling between the 1948 production of *R.U.R.* and 1949's *The Time Machine*. The play is the story of:

a Member of Parliament who, during a period of uncertainty and indecision, finds himself thrown into power; he builds up a political machine which grows beyond his control until it becomes a dictatorship with himself as 'The Leader' - but a very different one in an intellectual sense from others we have known.⁵

The *Radio Times* programme description says that it “takes place at Westminster and Oxford during a period of modern time which, together with the characters, is purely imaginary.”⁶ This emphasis on the difference between the represented “modern time” and actual modern time is unusual, particularly as the simple fact that this is a fiction in which actors play politicians who do not actually exist means that the drama is “purely imaginary”. By emphasising the fictitious, fantastic element of the play, the *Radio Times* listing thereby positions the drama within the genre, or sub-genre, of alternative history as “an account of a hypothetical past or present that might have been realized had some crucial historical event worked out differently.”⁷

As this chapter is concerned with the recognition of genre science fiction, the point must be considered that alternative history is itself a genre that is not always considered to be part of science fiction. Brian Stableford's essays on “alternative history” in *The A to Z of Science Fiction Literature* and on “alternate worlds” in Nicholls' *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* both mention that the notion of alternative history has been used both within and outside of genre science fiction. As

⁵ The Scanner, “Talk of the Week”, *Radio Times*, 15 October 1948, p.24

⁶ Anon., *Take Back Your Freedom* programme listing, *Radio Times*, 15 October 1948, p.26

⁷ Stableford, Brian, “Alternative History” in *The A to Z of Science Fiction Literature* (Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2005) p.4

with the “scientific romance”, there is an acceptability to the alternative history tale which stems, at least in part, from its long-standing historical existence as an intellectual and philosophical exercise. Stableford notes numerous early examples of alternative history, with a justification for this type of exercise appearing in an essay by Isaac d’Israeli in *The Curiosities of Literature*, a collection of primarily literary and historical anecdotes first published in four volumes between 1791 and 1823.⁸ d’Israeli’s item appears in the second volume of *The Curiosities of Literature*, first published in 1793, under the title “Of a History of Events Which Have Not Happened”, and mentions that:

A history of this kind we find in the ninth book of Livy; and it forms a digression, where, with his delightful copiousness, he reasons on the probable consequences which would have ensued had Alexander the Great invaded Italy.⁹

d’Israeli clearly positions this type of writing as a thought experiment in history, as a way of understanding how history and society are affected by individual events and decisions.

The acceptance of alternative history as a sub-genre of science fiction rests partly on the idea of the study of history itself as a science and partly on the way that alternative history narratives present an apparently logical extrapolation based on known factors, in the same way that writers like Heinlein or Asimov would present the scientific and technological elements of their science fiction stories as extrapolations of known facts and principles. Indeed, Asimov would himself, in his Foundation setting, write about the imaginary science of psychohistory as a way in which the events of history could not only be understood but also predicted through the scientific analysis of the psychological drives of large bodies of people.¹⁰ In the

⁸ Stableford, Brian, “Alternative History”, pp.4-5

⁹ d’Israeli, Isaac, “Of a History of Events Which Have Not Happened” from *The Curiosities of Literature*, http://www.spamula.net/col/archives/2005/12/of_a_history_of.html – accessed 8th September 2008

¹⁰ *Foundation* was originally published in *Astounding Science Fiction* (1942-1944) and as a “fix-up” novel in 1951, and was followed by *Foundation and Empire* (*Astounding Science Fiction* 1945; book publication 1952) and *Second Foundation* (*Astounding Science Fiction* 1948-1950; book publication 1953). This original “Foundation Trilogy” was expanded by Asimov with novels *Foundation’s Edge* (1982), *Foundation and Earth* (1983), *Prelude to Foundation* (1988) and *Forward the Foundation* (1988). The series was continued by other hands. It should be noted that there is an actual discipline called “psychohistory”, which does focus on understanding the psychological motivations behind

particular case of *Take Back Your Freedom*, the narrative is clearly associated with the elements of science fiction that concentrate on social commentary. As such, it sits alongside *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a depiction of a Britain taken over by authoritarianism, only *Take Back Your Freedom* shows the process of this change rather than showing the result and leaving the reader or viewer to extrapolate the path from “here” to the depicted “there”. As such, it presents an alternative present that is much closer to the actual present than the imagined future of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Holtby’s play was an expression of her pro-feminist, anti-Fascist politics. It was originally written in 1935, just before her death, and revised by Norman Ginsbury in 1939, receiving its first stage production in 1940.¹¹ Michael Barry’s adaptation for television eight years later retains this warning stance, but serves also as a way of explaining the rise of the Fascist societies which Britain had fought in the War. It also serves as a warning against allowing calls for a stronger, rebuilt Britain to lead to an authoritarian dictatorship in the name of idealism. The move from a plan to rebuild society to authoritarianism is made explicit by the dictator, Clayton:

I said – What is my soul compared with the service of the Plan? So I gave up my soul. Then I said – What is the Plan to the supremacy of the Party? And I gave up the Plan. Then I said – What is the Party to the satisfaction of my friends? And I gave up the Party. Then I said – What are my friends to the necessity of action? And I gave up my friends. Now there is nothing left but action, action to assert my independent will.¹²

This continued the way that science fiction drama, even if it was not recognised as such, was utilised by the early BBC television service as a warning about possible trends in society, be they treatment of the workers, as in *R.U.R.* and *The Time Machine*, or treatment of women, or the dangers of authoritarianism. This trend would also be an element in the next production under consideration, J.B.Priestley’s *Summer Day’s Dream*.

historical events, but which is concerned with the interpretation of the historical rather than the projection of future history.

¹¹ Anon., “Winifred Holtby”, <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/holtby.htm>, accessed 9th September 2008

¹² Barry, Michael, Winifred Holtby and Norman Ginsbury, *Take Back Your Freedom*, camera script held by BBC Written Archives Centre, p.67

Summer Day's Dream (1949)

Priestley had written for television since before the war, and would continue to do so throughout his life, but *Summer Day's Dream* was a television adaptation of a stage success, even carrying over the cast from a recent stage production at St.Martin's Theatre.¹³ Like Holtby, he was a pacifist, and would represent his fears about nuclear warfare in this and other plays, such as *Doomsday for Dyson* (Granada, 1958) and the *Out of the Unknown* episode "Level 7" (BBC, 1966). However, rather than concentrating on the horrors of nuclear war, Priestley used *Summer Day's Dream* to present a post-apocalyptic pastoral, where Britain has rebuilt itself after the war as a rural idyll, rather in the manner of William Morris' *News from Nowhere, or An Epoch of Rest* (1891) which "details an anti-industrial, rural-idyllic future England that resembles the Middle Ages rather than any high-tech extrapolation of industrial progress".¹⁴ In the 1975 Britain of Priestley's play, Shrewsbury is the biggest town, a barter system is in use and wind-power provides electricity to supplement the muscle power of people and draft animals. High technology has been abandoned, because "This is a little backwater of a country, no longer doing the world's work. [...] Let the people who are doing the world's work have the telephones and T.V.Coms - and the nervous breakdowns. We don't need 'em anymore."¹⁵

The plot of *Summer's Day Dream* involves the breakdown of a helicopter near a British manor farm on the South Downs. The passengers represent international interests who want to exploit the area's natural resources, conflicting with the desire of the now happily rural British to be left alone. The play argues for an acceptance of Britain's new place in the world, and that it is better for no longer having the responsibility now held by the United States and the Soviet Union as the post-War superpowers. Priestley accepts that development was necessary, particularly through the comment of Doctor Bahru that "You cannot understand what science and industry have meant to us in India. There was so much ignorance, filth,

¹³ Lejeune, C.A., "Television", *The Observer*, 13 November 1949; incidentally, St.Martin's was also the theatre which held the first London production of *R.U.R.*, with Basil Rathbone as Domain

¹⁴ Roberts, Adam, *The History of Science Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) p.120

¹⁵ Stephen in Priestley, J.B., *Summer Day's Dream* Camera Script, held by BBC Written Archives Centre,p.9

superstition, poverty. I am proud to be an Indian scientist.”¹⁶ Priestley also acknowledges Britain’s past as an explorer and a world power, but he suggests that this is a stage in the development of a civilisation, and that there is a time to move beyond the feeling of responsibility towards the world and to relax. In effect, he shows a Britain in comfortable rural retirement.

It is difficult to escape the possibility that Priestley was advocating that the post-War Britain of 1949 accept its diminished place on the world stage and take up this rural idyll. Where other science fiction productions served as warnings, this was not the case with *Summer Day’s Dream*, unless it was the warning which is given in passing about the way that industry and exploitation of natural resources will result in the destruction of the British countryside at the hands of migrant Chinese workers employed by multinational combines. The American Vice-President of the American Synthetic Products Corporation, working alongside the Synthetic Products Department of the Soviet Foreign Trade Commission and the South Asia Federation, presents their plans:

We can’t depend on the British. They don’t want the jobs, not even for good money.

However, our mobile labour unit can dump five to ten thousand Chinese on these hills as soon as we give ’em the word to go. Our construction boys - and there aren’t any better, believe me - will tear the guts out of these Downs, and in six months you won’t know the place. Big plant, landing grounds, rows of hutments, bungalows for the technicians, cafes, dance halls, T.V.palaces, bright lights, gambling joints if we use the Chinese.¹⁷

Considering that the late 1940s saw increased immigration into Britain as a response to the demands of industry for more workers, including the 492 Caribbeans brought on the *Empire Windrush* in 1948,¹⁸ this fear of a migrant workforce brought in by industry to alter the culture and physical structure of Britain appears a clear reflection of the concerns of some during this period. Nevertheless, the play as a whole is focussed more on the positive possibilities of the future, even if that is in the form of a romanticised idyll, while addressing concerns of the present.

¹⁶ Priestley, *Summer Day’s Dream*, p.60

¹⁷ Priestley, *Summer Day’s Dream*, p.25

¹⁸ Anon., “Windrush Settlers Arrive in Britain”, *The National Archives* website, http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/museum/item.asp?item_id=50 accessed 10th September 2008

“Stranger From Space” (1951-1953)

With the cliffhanger format well established by 1951 and already associated with popular American science fiction serials such as *The Adventures of Captain Marvel* (1941, British release 1950), *Dick Tracy* (1937, British release 1950), *Buck Rogers* (1939) and *Flash Gordon’s Trip to Mars* (1938, British re-release 1950), when the BBC utilised this format for a children’s programme that programme could therefore be expected to follow this same high adventure pattern. However, under the practical restrictions of early television and the BBC’s commitment to “inform, educate and entertain”, “Stranger From Space” took on elements of Aldiss’ “High” science fiction, reflecting concerns about personal and social responsibility and government paranoia.

Part of the fortnightly children’s magazine programme *Whirligig*, “Stranger From Space” was divided into two serials, both with the same title, with eleven episodes in the first serial and six in the second. Each episode lasted around ten minutes, and was slotted in alongside a set sequence of items. The first story arc of the serial followed the adventures of a Martian boy who has crashed on Earth and the attempts of a human boy to help him return home. This Martian also marks the first appearance of an extraterrestrial in British television science fiction, a concept which may be considered as an icon of the genre,¹⁹ but which is absent from all of the productions covered in this thesis apart from “Stranger From Space”, *The Voices* and the Quatermass serials. The second “Stranger From Space” serial, separated from the first by an unrelated six-episode circus serial called “Big Top”, focussed on an attempted Martian invasion of Earth which the two boys are instrumental in foiling. Both “boys” were played by 20-year olds, as of the first episode of the first serial, but a comment in episode eleven of that first serial that the human boy Ian has just passed his School Leaving Certificate implies that he, at least, is supposed to be fifteen.

The narrative exhibits a distrust of authority that would become common with narratives such as the Quatermass serials. This is not a Famous Five situation

¹⁹ See Jones, Gwyneth, “The Icons of Science Fiction” in Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

where the children are instrumental in solving a plot because they are not initially believed and so have to prove that the plot exists, but where the authorities ultimately deal with the criminals based on the children's information. In "Stranger From Space", the authorities are presented primarily as a threat; the crashed spacecraft is identified publicly as being extra-terrestrial, with a reward issued for information leading to the pilot's capture. The authorities automatically consider the alien pilot to probably be a spy, a highly realistic situation, considering that the real-world military interest in Unidentified Flying Objects was, and is, to establish "whether there might be anything of defence significance, such as an unauthorised or hostile aircraft in UK airspace".²⁰ When the mother of the boy who finds the alien says that the alien should give himself up, her son retorts, "He can't do that – they'd shut him up in prison and he might never get back to Mars."²¹ The alien, Bilaphodoros (known as "Bill"), reflects that "People are always afraid of the unknown" as the reason for the suspicious approach taken by the authorities.

The village policeman is presented as rather a bumbling fool. Patrolling soldiers on exercises present a threat. The boys' goal becomes to reach Professor Watkins, representing science and intelligence, but they also have to dodge the police guard around the spaceship that he has developed, and Watkins agrees that the best course is to hide them from the authorities. However, in guiding Bilaphodoros on his journey, the human boy, Ian, is listed as missing, and a £100 reward for his return is posted, effectively putting a price on both of their heads. Even Bilaphodoros' return to Mars reveals that the authorities there are oppressive and about to launch an invasion of Earth; their thanks to the Earth engineer who has accompanied the Martian on his return journey is to imprison him (as it was feared the Earth authorities would do to the Martian) and dismantle his rocket, exactly as the Earth authorities did to Bilaphodoros' spaceship. Clearly, authority is remarkably similar in its intended actions and is not to be trusted regardless of what

²⁰ Linda Unwin, Desk Officer in Directorate of Air Staff, quoted on the Ministry of Defence website news item "The Truth is Out There ... Under FOI", 10th March 2006, <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/DefencePolicyAndBusiness/TheTruthIsOutThereUnderFoi.htm>, accessed 23rd February 2007

²¹ Adair, Hazel and Ronald Marriott, Script for *Stranger From Space* "Episode 1: Crash Landing", held by BBC Written Archives

planet it is from. Even the BBC itself is shown to be unhelpful due to its bureaucracy, when it is called upon to transmit a message to Mars (via the Overseas Service, of course) but will not do so without the proper authorization.

This anti-authoritarian stance seems an unusual one for a children's television programme of the early 1950s to take, particularly considering that the educational remit of the BBC could be taken to include instilling social values, such as a respect for figures of authority. There is educational content to the serial, but it is not provided through open explanation: the action never pauses while a character explains a scientific principle or a historical fact. Instead, the boys learn more about thinking and acting for themselves, and about the values of friendship and trust.

This need for independence could be attributed to the demands of the story: if the authorities were perfectly happy to help Bilaphodorous back to Mars, and this assistance were as easily accessed as asking a policeman, then the boys could not have their adventures. However, the emphasis on the civil war on Mars and the direct mirroring of the actions of the Earth and Martian authorities suggests that there may be another agenda at work. The Martian Leader emphasises the need to suppress "personal feelings, as one must on Mars, for the good of the community".²² A degree of personal reserve can be seen as a good thing for any community with a fairly high population density; a 1929 guide to manners states that, in conversation:

Tact is essential. The man who always "speaks as he feels" may be very candid and straightforward, but it is not long before he says something which hurts the feelings of those with whom he is speaking.²³

However, the indications are that, on the Mars of *Stranger from Space*, the suppression of personal feelings goes beyond mere courtesy to another level, that of dictatorship. As Bilaphodorous explains to his human friend:

all Martians are not as cold and unfeeling as the Leader and there are lots of us who want things to be different. As it stands, we have not freedom at all – everything is "for the good of the community".²⁴

²² Adair and Marriott, "Stranger From Space" Episode 10

²³ Devereux, G.R.M., *Etiquette for Men: A Book of Modern Manners and Customs* (London: Chancellor Press, 2002) p.63 – first printed in 1929 by C.Arthur Pearson, Ltd.

²⁴ Adair and Marriott, "Stranger From Space" Episode 10

This was the time of the Korean War, a war which could be perceived in terms of Communism versus Western democracy as the Soviet-supported North Korean forces initially invaded UN-supported South Korea. While the UN forces, which were largely American, recaptured Seoul within three months of the initial attack, they then continued onwards into North Korean territory, with the result that China brought in forces to defend North Korea. As the Soviet Union and China had signed a mutual-defence treaty in February 1950, eight months before China entered the Korean War, the possibility of escalation from a civil war to a wider conflict must have seemed a real one. The use of nuclear weapons was seriously considered by the Americans, to the extent of simulated bomb runs being carried out. The threat presented by Communism must have seemed much more immediate and real with this open warfare than it had when it remained a theoretical, political and economic enemy.

However, the serial is clearly informed by the Cold War and its accompanying fears. The crashed Martian is to be treated as a spy by the authorities; Professor Watkins' rocket project is protected from, but ultimately infiltrated by, foreign agents; Bilaphodoros spends some time as a spy in the Gorgolian²⁵ forces that he is rebelling against; the Martian authoritarian regime undertakes brainwashing. Brainwashing as a concept first came to general awareness during the Korean War, but the technique used here is one of psychic control. Nevertheless, as the change in the subject's beliefs is permanent until reversed by the person who made the mental change, this is simply a pseudo-science method standing in for a real-world process, avoiding the time and unpleasantness needed to depict any actual brainwashing. This is, after all, a children's serial. Not only that, but if, as T.A.Shippey has stated, "ever since Korea it had been accepted that everybody cracked, that 'brainwashing' was as certain as a surgical operation",²⁶ then simply conveying that someone had been brainwashed was enough.

²⁵ Gorgol is the leader of the Martian faction intent on invading Earth. It is unclear whether or not he is the same character as the one only identified as "Leader" in the scripts for the first ten episodes of the serial.

²⁶ Shippey, T.A., "The cold war in science fiction, 1940-1960" in Patrick Parrinder, *Science Fiction: A critical guide* (London: Longman, 1979), p.95

The previous *Whirligig* serials had also focussed on spies, indicating that the subject was deemed exciting and yet inoffensive enough for young viewers. The opportunities that the spy genre offers for both visceral and intellectual engagement make it an obvious one for children, concealing encouragement to thought within a gripping narrative. The secret agent or detective, as this applies equally to both, will probably have to deal with chases, traps, escape and confrontation, engaging the emotions, but they are also likely to have to assemble clues, solve puzzles and crack codes to attain their goals, encouraging the audience to attempt to also engage their intelligence in order to identify and defeat the villain before they are unmasked and beaten by the hero within the fiction. The presentation of a cryptographic challenge to the characters, which was also presented as a competition to the viewers, at the end of each episode of the serial “The Shadow Strikes Back” illustrates that the producers of *Whirligig* were well aware of this combination of intellectual challenge and emotional engagement within the spy / detective thriller genre.

It could be thought that matters of Cold War ambiguity would have no place in a children’s programme from a public service broadcaster with a remit to “educate, inform and entertain”, yet there are elements of it within “Stranger from Space”. Both Martian factions are seeking to use Earth as a refuge from their doomed planet, with their war being over whether to attain that refuge through aggression or negotiation. Shippey claims that it is:

possible to see much science fiction of the 1940s and 1950s, and later, as a ‘thinking machine’ for the convenience of people largely without academic support or intellectual patronage.²⁷

In the case of “Stranger from Space”, science fiction may be seen as introducing ideas of ambiguity to a young audience, particularly ambiguity in relation to authority and an encouragement to examine the motivation and intent behind actions rather than to take them at face value. This also fits with the encouragement of self-reliance and independent action which is suggested by the way that the heroes of the serials operate largely without any formal support apparatus, but more from within a network of friends. Formal organisations take time and become entangled in

²⁷ Shippey, “The Cold War in Science Fiction, 1940-1960”, in Parrinder, *Science Fiction: A critical guide*, p.108

bureaucracy, and the actions of the heroes are those that have to be taken urgently in order to save the day, with delay being potentially disastrous.

While “Stranger from Space” is informed by the spy thriller and that genre’s emotional grip, it is still definitely science fiction, which is supposedly an intellectual genre. Except that this is science fiction of the form most commonly seen on television, where the technical and intellectual aspects of the genre are subservient to narrative and to excitement. There are problems within the serials’ narrative which require a form of problem solving based on the elements already stated within the story: the viewer is given the information necessary to devise a solution at the same time as the characters on screen. For example, the information that Bilaphodoros has some telepathic abilities is provided in the first episode, and so allows the viewer to work out that the two boys will be able to successfully challenge a circus mind reader in episode three, and thereby gain enough money to continue on their trip towards Professor Watkins. The information is given that the authorities have retrieved Bilaphodoros’ crashed craft, which allows the viewer to work out that the characters may be able to use or copy its propulsion system when it is revealed that Watkins’ atomic rocket motors will not be ready in time, and this is what happens. The logic of the setting is followed through quite precisely, in true science-fictional manner.

However, the demands of the format mean that the action of the serial has to be rapid, in order to fit into a ten-minute episode with a cliffhanger ending. It is possibly this rapidity, or the concept of the child audience, that leads the serial to not follow through on the wider implications of its science fictional presuppositions. In particular, Martian society does not appear to be one which a race with powers of telepathy and mental control over others would have developed, as there is extensive freedom of thought and active dissent to the point of civil war. There is also a lack of consistency, in that Bilaphodoros states in the first episode that the Martians communicate through telepathy, yet they are shown talking with each other, even when there is no non-Martian in the room that they may also wish to speak to, and even if there were, previous episodes had shown that Bilaphodoros was perfectly capable of transmitting his thoughts to humans, so there is no need for any of them to talk aloud. This is a clear case of the material established within the fiction making

way for the realities of television production. A degree of pre-recorded voice over may be acceptable to represent telepathy, but associating disembodied voices with individual characters over multiple scenes and episodes would not be, involving additional pre-production work and the effort for the performers in matching their performance to the pre-recorded dialogue. It would probably also be dismissed as being too “experimental”, resembling some sort of Brechtian distancing technique, and thereby being too disruptive to the enjoyment of the viewer, which relies to some extent upon familiarity. The lack of complete follow-through on the consequences of the nova²⁸ also reinforces the notion that the writers of the serial were more interested in drawing comparisons between the Earth and Martian authorities within the text and also connecting to situations outside the narrative rather than trying to develop a completely consistent alternate world.

Prefiguring Professor Bernard Quatermass and his British Rocket Group with their atomic-powered experimental rockets is Professor Bernard Watkins and his atomic-powered experimental rocket. Watkins presents an interesting figure; he is shown to be stereotypically absent-minded-yet-brilliant, a space ship designer, atomic scientist and chemist, a polymath in the way that the majority of screen scientists seem to be, as though science were a single discipline and mastery of one aspect brought mastery of all. This lack of understanding of the realities of practical science recurs throughout screen science fiction, but there is one practicality that “Stranger from Space” engages with which is totally real, and that is government involvement with science. The strategic possibilities of a rocket, let alone an atomic-powered one, are acknowledged in the spies who are pursuing Watkins’ work and by the guard assigned to his work by the Government. However, the project itself has problems in that it requires further Government funding for the atomic engines to be completed, and this money is not forthcoming. The problems of governmental involvement in scientific research would form a theme throughout the three BBC “Quatermass” serials and the two “Andromeda” serials, particularly as regards the militarisation of that research. This was a real-world concern, one which received focus in the 1940s and 1950s with attempts to suppress the transmission of scientific

²⁸ Darko Suvin’s term for the point of difference between the real world and the world presented in a science fiction narrative is “novum”.

information which might aid a potential enemy, for example by banning the transportation of scientific journals into the Soviet Union. The United States even refused the sharing of nuclear technology with countries like Britain and Canada that had helped contribute to the development of that technology.

This militarisation of research was clearly a continuation of the emphasis on research for military application during the war, an emphasis which brought the importance of scientific and technological advance firmly into the public focus.

The relationship between the war, science and technology, and post-war British society is rather similar to that between the war, economic and social planning, and post-war society. Many of the great scientific and technological developments could scarcely be attributed to conscious decision-making. Thus, although there was great enthusiasm for, and much talk about, the importance of science and technology to Britain's social regeneration, there was a good deal less understanding of how to set about harnessing science and technology in the most effective manner. As there was to be a hit-and-miss quality about post-war social engineering, so there was to be something of the same quality about the nation's exploitation of science and technology.²⁹

This "hit-and-miss quality" emphasises the reliance on individual projects and enthusiasms, such as Watkins', or Quatermass', fictional rocket project. The scientist continues in the role of "boffin", the unusual backroom boy who develops strange ideas that will be put to practical use by the authorities, such as bouncing radio waves off flying objects in order to see them, or having a bomb bounce in order to hit its target at the optimum point.

There is a real tension between the accumulation of knowledge and the maintaining of the national interest. Bilaphodorous actually is a spy, firstly gathering information on Earth and its inhabitants and then explicitly acting as a spy in the Gorgolite camp during the Martian civil war. His return to Mars in an Earth ship allows the Martians to dismantle that ship and learn more about the level of technology on Earth, just as the humans, including Professor Watkins, had dismantled the remains of Bilaphodorous' ship and learnt from that. This is part of the ambiguity of the serial, in acknowledging that all sides behave in the same way in their attempts to gain superiority. Where there is an element of perceived

²⁹ Marwick, Arthur, *The Pelican Social History of Britain: British Society Since 1945* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982) p.25

superiority other than technical, it is moral superiority on the part of the serials' heroes. When they are presented with an opportunity to kill Gorgol and his forces, they refuse to do so: "We want to win this war, but we can't kill them off wholesale."³⁰

Watkins' scientist-as-boffin role has its counterpart in John, the practical engineer who acts as the pilot to take Bilaphodorous back to Mars and then plays a key role in the second serial, replacing Ian as the main human protagonist. Science is esoteric and conducted by strange but brilliant men who cannot be understood by ordinary people, only admired, while technology and engineering are the sort of practical subjects that can be readily understood by anyone who has ever tinkered with a car engine, fixed a watch or put up some shelves. Except that the audience is spared even that effort of understanding, as the only real technological issue raised is the way that the Martian propulsion system works; ultimately, it is compared to a jet engine that sucks in energy rather than air. The fascination is not in the actual science or even the mechanics of a process, but in the application of the idea, as Jenny Uglow has noted:

Again and again we find [...] that technological inventions 'take off' in public imagination, once you can see their effects or use their power, but we don't have to understand their workings; their charm depends on the invisibility of the human skills that made them.³¹

As a scientist, Professor Watkins represents the workings, whereas John, who is only seen to be exercising practical skills (piloting) on objects (the rocket) created by Watkins' workings, receives the reflected charm of the object. He is the pilot who takes on the reflected glow of the magnificent machine which he has mastered, which he controls. He has subdued the unknown, the mysterious workings of the rocket, on our behalf and so is worthy of praise. This leads to his presentation in the second serial as chief technical advisor of the rocket project research station, tackling the practical running of the operation while Watkins concentrates on the theory. As he puts it, his promotion is due to his experience as the only person who has actually been to Mars and "gives me the free run of the whole research station even though

³⁰ Adair and Marriott, "Stranger from Space", episode 14, p.19

³¹ Uglow, Jenny, "Introduction: 'Possibility'" in Francis Spufford and Jenny Uglow, *Cultural Babbage: Technology, Time and Invention* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996) p.20

I'm really only an engineer".³² Like Dan Dare, whose adventures in *Eagle* comic began in April 1950, John is the daredevil pilot, the adventurer, but his shift in position from "only an engineer" to chief technical advisor represents not only his mastery of modern machinery, and therefore heroic status to the rest of society, but also freer movement within society in a meritocracy rather than a society based on pre-existing social standing.

This movement was part of the atmosphere of social recovery and development following the war, an atmosphere that was supposed to be embodied by the 1951 Festival of Britain. The Festival featured a number of futuristic and technological exhibits intended to show off the best of what Britain could offer. In addition to the primary exhibition site on the South Bank in London, there were also a variety of events and activities across the United Kingdom. These included a touring exhibition, meaning that many more people were able to see and take part in the Festival than could have seen "Stranger from Space", and an Exhibition of Science in Kensington, a separation showing the clear distinction between science and its practical application in the society. The South Bank Exhibition was divided into four broad areas, The Land, The Dome of Discovery, The People and "Other Downstream Displays", which included television and telecinema. The focus of all parts of the exhibition, including those focussed on the countryside, was on the way that humans, specifically the British, have manipulated their environment through their ingenuity. It was, in effect, praise for technology and the application of science and design and specifically British ingenuity.

Surprisingly, the Martian Leader in "Stranger from Space" also praises Britain, or rather England. Noting that John comes from England, he says:

Your country has a great history of exploration and adventure. It is fitting that an Englishman should be the first to reach Mars. England! It is very small.³³

This comment about the size of England fits in with the national self-image of England as a small nation wielding great power and bravery across the world, the little island that stood up to Hitler's advance across Europe, the nation of small

³² Adair and Marriott, "Stranger from Space", episode 11, p.13

³³ Adair and Marriott, "Stranger from Space", episode 9, p.16

villages and shopkeepers that was head of the largest Empire on Earth. This narrative is clearly part of the Festival of Britain's ideology, as illustrated by the description of the The Land section of the Festival brochure:

The great witness of British exploration by land is the Commonwealth of Nations. By now, its strongest binding force is common ideas and ideals, but its many countries are still closely linked by a vast communications system, the development of which is largely the result of British enterprise - sea lanes, air routes, railways, cables and radio.

What has followed on the exploration of overseas territories is the main motif of this section. For the most part they have been developed by the application of knowledge gained, or skills acquired, in the British Isles themselves - better methods of surveying, the harnessing of water, the improvement of agriculture, the conquest of pests and of disease and engineering achievements of many different kinds. Most of these have their origins in discoveries made in the other spheres of research shown in the remaining sections of the Dome.³⁴

Note there the emphasis on "the application of knowledge gained", stressing the usage of practical developments from pure intellectual endeavour.

The Dome itself looked rather like a stereotypical flying saucer come to rest in the midst of the Festival, with the Skylon beside it a phallically-upthrust rocket representing British determination to continue its explorations of the past by piercing the sky itself. The iconography of science fiction had entered everyday life.

³⁴ Festival of Britain guide text, reproduced at *Festival of Britain*,
<http://www.packer34.freemove.co.uk/land.htm>, accessed 23rd February 2007

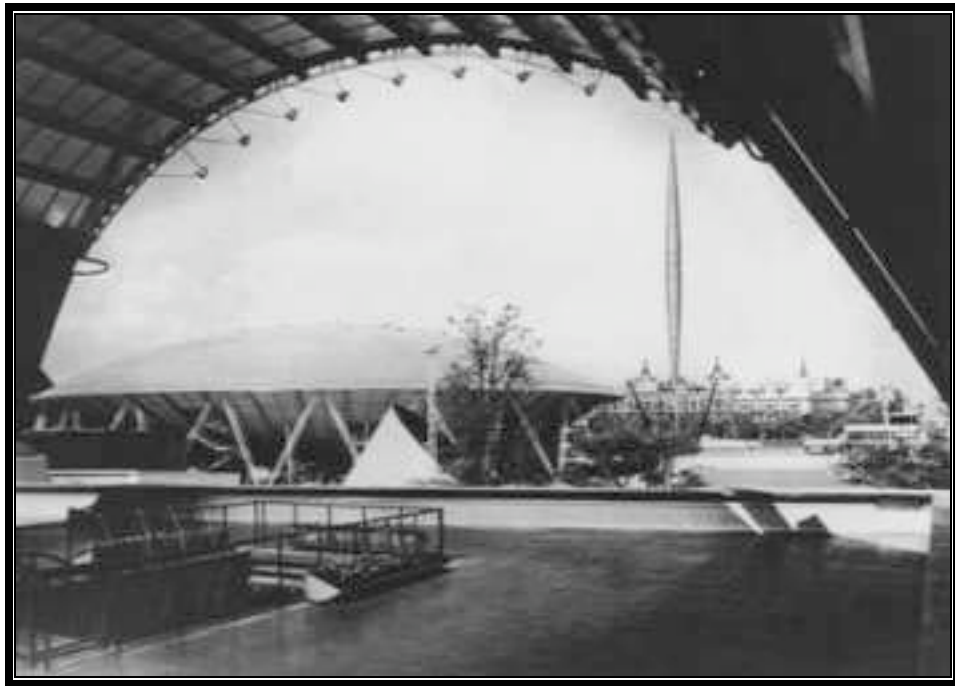


Figure 5: Festival of Britain Dome of Discovery and Skylon

This was also a time of growth for television. The service was no longer simply for those within reach of the Alexander Palace transmitter, but covered the West Midlands and Manchester, with “parts of Scotland, Wales and the West”³⁵ coming under the expanding service area during the run of “Stranger from Space”. There were obvious effects of the expansion of the reception area, particularly on the composition of the audience. The intention of supplying the viewer with access to material that they might not otherwise see was complicated in that the wider audience had, as a whole, access to a greater variety of items of interest. However, the fact that the Television Service still tended to look within London for its material meant that it really could deliver access to new sights and sounds for a wider section of its audience.

The risk of competition undoubtedly influenced programme-making at the BBC Television Service. However, to see it as the main driver for improvement in programme quality or changes in programme content would be to discount the other influences on the service. As shown in **Section One**, while there may have been a degree of conservatism in early television broadcasting, there were also producers

³⁵ Crisell, Andrew, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London: Routledge, 1997) p.79

willing to take risks and experiment with form and content. While the television schedule of 1951 was not that different from the schedule of 1938, despite extra hours, it did have a more regular and segmented appearance. A certain degree of audience profiling was in place from the late 1940s in the labelling of strands such as *Teen-Age Show*, *For the Children*, *For the Housewife*, *Designed for Women*. These labels indicated that the programming was exclusive, intended for a particular audience rather than being something suitable for all who choose to watch it. By the early 1950s, some of these strand titles were less blunt in their labelling, with children now being invited to *Watch With Mother* or to follow *Telescope* or *Whirligig*, but they were still labelled clearly in the *Radio Times* as programmes for children. The magazine programmes for children also had age-related stranding within each broadcast. The serial element in *Whirligig* is clearly intended for an older audience than the animated Western “The Adventures of Hank” or the slapstick linking material from presenter Humphrey Lestocq, with the intermingling of informative, amusing and educational items seeking to maintain the interest of a mixed audience throughout the programme, or at least until the item that they favoured had been shown.

The form of the serial can also be taken as a response to the potential of competition, as a successful ongoing narrative attracts an ongoing audience, guaranteeing a certain level of viewership who will not be drawn away by the competing channel, as well as offering cost benefits through the reuse of props and settings and “a regular identity for certain time slots during the week”.³⁶ However, the serial had its place on British television before the threat of competition was made real in 1951. “Television’s first film serial”³⁷ was *Rex and Rinty* from April 1949, an imported American serial about the adventures of Rex the horse and Rin-Tin-Tin Jr., while the domestically-produced *Little Women* was also shown over the same period. In terms of series, these actually debuted before the BBC tackled a serial. Films about cowboys and Mounties were a regular part of children’s programming from the late 1940s onwards, featuring recurring characters such as

³⁶ Jacobs, Jason, *The Intimate Screen: Early British Television Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p.112

³⁷ The Scanner, “Talk of the Week”, *Radio Times*, 15th April 1949, p.28

Hopalong Cassidy in regular adventures, but the BBC itself produced a series of six films called *Telecrimes* shown once a week from 22nd October 1946, which Jason Jacobs claims mark “the emergence of a crime/thriller genre” in television.³⁸ Each fifteen-to-twenty-minute episode featured two cases for James Raglan as Inspector Cameron. While the start time of the programme varied between 8:30 pm and 10:00 pm, this regular series of episodes focussing on the same character is probably the first drama series on British television.

An obvious question arising from these early examples of serialisation on television is, “Why were they aimed at children?” With the exception of *Telecrimes*, the early serials, whether domestic or imported, and film series were screened for children in the afternoons. It cannot be that there was a lack of ideas for children’s programming that necessitated using imported film material, as a large proportion of children’s broadcasts were domestic productions. Nevertheless, it does appear that the BBC realised the popularity with children of filmed serials and short, series dramas as part of cinema programmes, and so used the pre-recorded material to meet the demands of the audience. As the serials are occasionally marked in the *Radio Times* listings as being specifically for older children, it may also be that there was an imagination gap with relation to what would entertain a certain age group. Having pre-recorded material in the schedule would also allow time for the movement of cameras and the redressing of studios to provide for the live programmes that dominated the schedule, with outside broadcasts offering similar opportunities at other times of the schedule.

The serial’s popularity with children may relate, in part, to the issues of combining mental and emotional engagement, although the mental engagement in a number of cases may well have extended no further than “How will they get out of the cliffhanger situation?” Filmed serials offered excitement and adventure, and also a visual scope that the live, studio-bound drama of the time could not manage. When it came to the production of original serials for children, the BBC could not provide that particular sort of thrill, but they retained the thriller genre elements which had

³⁸ Jacobs, *The Intimate Screen*, p.99

already proved successful with adult audiences, giving a different kind of thrill from the American serials.

This brings us back to Aldiss' description of the difference between American and British science fiction. Of British science fiction, he says, "Its appeal, though limited, had always been to an intelligent middle-class audience", contrasted with the American style, which appealed to "simpler audiences". Yet "Stranger from Space", even though it derives its form and some of its ideas from American serials and thrillers, is also the sort of material that the BBC had already been delivering to "an intelligent middle-class audience", as this relatively affluent, culturally acquisitive group formed the main audience for the television service. There was a constant stream of thriller plays, including the first series on British television as described above, which would have aimed for the same mixture of emotional and intellectual involvement to be found in "Stranger from Space". The serial's engagement with the complicating issues of the Cold War, particularly in terms of trust and relationship with authority, also suggest that it contains serious ideas available for any intelligent member of the audience to consider at their leisure. However, "Stranger from Space" was still primarily an entertainment, a thrilling diversion, rather than a serious extrapolation of a new principle or an analogy for a contemporary issue. Thus, it falls somewhere between Aldiss' two strands, taking an American sci-fi form intended for entertainment and thrills, and informing it with contemporary issues in the manner of European scientific romance. It is this mixture which brings about the distinctive flavour of serial British television science fiction, from the Quatermass serials, through the Andromeda programmes, *Doctor Who*, *Blake's Seven* and onwards.

No Smoking! (1952)

Considering that there is a basic similarity between the plot of *No Smoking!* and that of *The Man in the White Suit* (Ealing Studios, 1951), one possibility regarding the play is that it was created to effectively "cash-in" on the success of the film. While the Ealing film is not mentioned in any of the documents held by the BBC Written Archives Centre concerning *No Smoking!*, the files are not complete and only hold documents directly and explicitly relating to the play. A direct

comparison would not necessarily have been made by people keen to find something similar to the film, and even if it were, that comparison would not necessarily be recorded in the documentation relating directly to the play. Such an understanding of *No Smoking!* would follow Altman's theory that producers are more concerned with finding direct points of similarity between productions rather than using the broad similarity of genre in their attempts to reproduce the success of individual productions.³⁹ The comparison between the two productions was even briefly touched upon by the television reviewer for *The Listener*, who noted "it was at best a good little idea, amusing as a British film studio might conceive of amusement (e.g. 'The Man in the White Suit')".⁴⁰ It is also interesting to note that at least three film companies made approaches to the BBC regarding the possibility of adapting the play for the cinema, possibly looking themselves to repeat the success of the television version while also echoing the Ealing comedy, with a film version from Tempean Films finally being released in 1955.⁴¹

There are problems with this idea, though. Not only is there no direct reference to *The Man in the White Suit* in the remaining documentation for *No Smoking!*, but there are no real connections to the Ealing film beyond the comedic treatment of the broad plot line of "scientist invents product for the benefit of humanity and is hounded by vested interests as a result". No cast members or writers are carried over from *The Man in the White Suit* to the television play *No Smoking!*, and the actual events of the play are rather different to those of the film, although this may in part be due to the differing capabilities of film and television, and both do end with the scientist protagonist apparently having a new idea that will lead to further events similar to those just shown. Where Ealing could offer up a montage of explosive experiments and a large-scale chase sequence across a night-time city, the BBC focused more on the consequences and politicking of the central invention, eschewing slapstick for conversational comedy. There is also the fact that the writers of *No Smoking!* were already in discussions and producing rewrites for the play in

³⁹ Altman, Rick, *Film/Genre* (London: BFi Publishing, 1999) p.57

⁴⁰ Hope-Wallace, Philip, "The Critic on the Hearth", *The Listener*, 27 March 1952, p.526

⁴¹ The BBC Written Archive Centre holds an undated synopsis of the play written by George Moresby White and prepared for Cygnet Films Ltd.. There is also a letter from Mr Boulting's secretary, Charter Film Productions dated 2 May 1952. BBC WAC T5/366/2

July 1950⁴² while *The Man in the White Suit* was not released until August 1951, although the Ealing film was based on an existing, if unproduced, play.⁴³

What this question of precedence amounts to is that *No Smoking!* cannot be understood simply as a “cashing-in” on the success of *The Man in the White Suit*. Which itself means that the similarities must be down to other reasons, with the most likely being that the theme and approach shared by both pieces related to underlying concerns of society at the time. In particular, both productions relate to the problems brought into society when the ingenuity of scientists is not directed into war work but let loose on industry. With the return of the male workforce from the armed forces adding to the female workers that had taken over many industrial roles during the war, and the advance of industrial technology and processes, there was concern about the availability of employment. Both the ever-clean, indestructible miracle cloth of *The Man in the White Suit* and the stop-smoking pill of *No Smoking!* present threats to the livelihoods of workers and industrialists alike.

No Smoking! takes the time that it saves by not having slapstick action sequences to explore the economic implications of the innovation further than the Ealing film, something which is enabled by the threat posed by the anti-smoking pill not being recognised until it is already on the open market, while the fabric in *The Man in the White Suit* is recognised as a threat before it has entered full production. So not only does *No Smoking!* show representatives of the British tobacco industry facing a downturn in sales, but tobacconists are forced out of business, and even tramps are shown to be out-of-pocket because they can no longer collect discarded cigarette butts in order to create and sell new cigarettes from the tobacco from the butts. At the same time, the economic problem is shown to extend upwards to the national level, as the British Exchequer loses its tax income from tobacco sales, and to the international level, as a diplomatic incident with America starts over the banning of the anti-smoking pills in the US leading to smuggling and gangsterism. In other words, the play takes the time to illustrate the interconnectedness of the British, and, indeed, international, economy and the effects that just one change can have. Even if the play had not been introduced by the caption “Time: The Future - Who

⁴² See, for example, memo from W.P.Rilla to Michael Barry, 20 July 1950, BBC WAC T5/366/2

⁴³ Powell, Dilys, *The Golden Screen: Fifty Years of Films* (London: Headline, 1989) p.97

Knows Exactly When?”⁴⁴ this elaboration on the social effects of a scientific innovation is what makes *No Smoking!* clearly a science fiction genre piece, although this does stand in opposition to Susan Sontag’s assertion that “the notion of science as a social activity, interlocking with social and political interests, is unacknowledged” in science fiction film.⁴⁵

However, the concerns with the genre of the play expressed in the documents held by the BBC Written Archives Centre are not about whether or not it is science fiction. That genre is not mentioned at all, nor is there any mention of Wells, Verne or “scientific romance”. There is only an opinion expressed by co-writer Rex Rienits about the approach of George Moresby-White, co-writer and originator of the story, about what kind of *comedy* the play is: “White’s fundamental mistake has been to try to treat a satirical fantasy in the manner of a domestic comedy, and the two just don’t go.”⁴⁶ This shows that Rienits’ concern was with the immediate mode of the play rather than any broad overarching genre, such as comedy, that it may have been a part of. The use of the phrase “satirical fantasy” also suggests that Rienits was aware of the possibilities of commenting on current society through a fantastically-driven plot, so much so that a generic label incorporating both the satire and the fantastic element was used, but that he did not distinguish between the irrational fantasy based on magic and the rational fantasy based around science. For Rienits, and the writers of the *Radio Times* listings and editorial for the play, the main point about the play was that it was a comedy, with its extrapolation of the effects of science upon society in a future setting of lesser importance than the fact that it was supposed to make people laugh.

Yet for science fiction critics, the satirical fantasy elements of the play are more important, connecting *No Smoking!* to the tradition of texts such as *Gulliver’s Travels*, which is frequently cited as early science fiction, or a forerunner of the genre. These satirical fantasy elements are the elements which connect it to one of the key uses of science fiction as a genre, with Amis claiming that science fiction’s:

⁴⁴ Memo. Julian Fuller to Senior Artist, undated, BBC WAC T5/366/2

⁴⁵ Sontag, Susan, "The Imagination of Disaster" in Gilbert Adair (ed.), *Movies* (London: Penguin, 1999) p.183

⁴⁶ Letter, Rex Rienits to Stephen Harrison, 11th July 1951, BBC WAC T5/366/2

most important use, I submit, is a means of dramatising social inquiry, as providing a fictional mode in which cultural tendencies can be isolated and judged.⁴⁷

No Smoking! does this by demonstrating the interconnectedness of society, and making a particular note of post-war British dependency upon the United States, the dependency that Priestley's *Summer Day's Dream* argues against. Not only is there a bullying American Ambassador trying to convince the British government to ban the anti-smoking pill, and British and American gangsters working together to provide the pills to the United States, but the pill would never have expanded its sales beyond the small village where it was first made if it were not for an American marketing manager who encountered it by accident and decided to make it big, a character whose connection to England stems entirely from his being billeted there during the Second World War.

While it would be historically inaccurate to characterise Britain as a nation of small shopkeepers and backroom innovators and Americans as capitalist exploiters focussing on large companies and industrial-scale production, that view is certainly not uncommon. It informed *Summer Day's Dream* and it can also be perceived in *No Smoking!*, with both productions sharing a distrust of the exploitation of British resources by American businessmen. This is a post-imperial response to the loss of power by Britain, a loss of power clearly symbolised by the loans from the United States and Canada which Britain relied upon during World War II and in the immediate post-War years, and which were only fully repaid at the end of 2006.⁴⁸ At the same time, there was a greater, and increasing, engagement with American culture which is illustrated by the adoption of the American genre term "science fiction".

What *No Smoking!* illustrates is the way that a production can fit firmly within a genre, based both on definition and tradition, despite there being no intention for it to be part of that genre, or even any particular awareness of the genre. The future setting and the extrapolation of the effects of a scientific discovery place

⁴⁷ Amis, *New Maps of Hell*, p.54

⁴⁸ Anon., "UK settles World War II debts to allies", BBC News Online, 29 December 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6215847.stm> accessed 17 April 2007

it firmly within most definitions of science fiction, and the tradition of tales by Verne, Wells and various other practitioners of science fiction and scientific romance that would have been well-known at the time, so this is not simply a case of applying definitions retrospectively. The satirical fantasy approach connects the play to Swift's *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World, by Lemuel Gulliver*, which is itself often cited as part of the prehistory of the science fiction genre, as Kingsley Amis noted. And yet, despite these connections, the play was considered at the time as a comedy, not as a science fiction or scientific romance piece. The tradition of the satirical fantasy that was seen as the overriding genre in relation to *No Smoking!* fitted with a satirical mode in the culture which was also represented by *The Man in the White Suit* and similar comedies. Just as Altman states that "At every turn, we find that Hollywood labours to identify its pictures with multiple genres, in order to benefit from the increased interest that this strategy inspires in diverse demographic groups",⁴⁹ so it can also be expected that those involved in producing *No Smoking!* would emphasise the popular, broad genre of comedy rather than the niche genre of science fiction. As their promotional opportunities were limited to the *Radio Times* listing and accompanying articles, with the possibility of some promotion through the general press, the decision to focus on the more populist attributes of the production are unsurprising. This focus on the more popular genre label attributable to a production can also be used as a way of approaching the science fiction mystery, as exemplified by *Mystery Story*.

Mystery Story (1952)

The one use of "science fiction" in the *Radio Times* in relation to a programme before 1955 (the end point of my research) is an editorial heading given to two letters relating to the production *Mystery Story* in 1952. Neither letter uses the phrase "science fiction", although one does refer to "scientific-romances" and asks for more, as "They make a delightful change from the usual run of plays".⁵⁰ This follows the lead given by the listing for the play, which claims that "Jules Verne and H.G.Wells would highly approve of the 'scientific-romantic' mystery here being

⁴⁹ Altman, *Film/Genre*, p.57

⁵⁰ Shaw, N.J., Letter, "Viewers Write to the 'Radio Times'", *Radio Times*, 29 August 1952, p.38

carried to the n th degree, in a flurry of plot based on the Space-Time Continuum and the impenetrability of natural forces.”⁵¹ However, despite describing the play as a “‘scientific-romantic’ mystery”, the listing also describes it as a “new American play”,⁵² thereby complicating the associations of science fiction as American and scientific romance as European.

The use of the term “science fiction” in the *Radio Times* in reference to *Mystery Story* suggests that the phrase was finding its way into general discourse by 1952. Indeed, the first appearance of the phrase as a description of a genre in *The Times* is in October 1950, in an article on interplanetary travel by Fred Hoyle, himself a keen reader and, later, writer of science fiction as well as a scientist, representing a bridge between the genre ghetto and the mainstream.⁵³ David Pringle has indicated that:

In Britain, it took a little longer for the public to become aware of sf as a book-publishing category; nevertheless, ‘science fiction’ seems to have become a widely-used term in the early 1950s. The success of John Wyndham’s *The Day of the Triffids* [first published 1951] encouraged the London publisher Michael Joseph to experiment with an sf line, and others such as Hart-Davis, Sidgewick and Jackson, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, Dobson, and Heinemann also dabbled.⁵⁴

In addition to this he claims that “1950 was also the year of the first Hollywood sci-fi movie, *Destination Moon*”,⁵⁵ supporting the idea that there was a general growth in awareness of the genre called “science fiction” across the media.

Despite the references to European writers such as Verne and Wells and the tradition of scientific romances, the use of the term “science fiction” immediately places the production so-labelled into a Trans-Atlantic context. Writing originally in 1960, Amis noted that:

The prehistory of science fiction, up until 1914 or later, is admittedly as much British as American, and until quite recently the phenomenon of the serious author who takes an occasional trip into science fiction (Huxley, Orwell, William Golding - in a rather different sense) has been British rather

⁵¹ Hale, Lionel, “Mystery Story”, *Radio Times*, 15 August 1952, p.38

⁵² Anon., “Mystery Story” listing, *Radio Times*, 15 August 1952, p.38

⁵³ Hoyle, Fred, “Exploring the Solar System”, *The Times*, 16 October 1950

⁵⁴ Pringle, David, *Science Fiction: The 100 Best Novels* (London: Xanadu Publications, 1985) pp.13-14

⁵⁵ Pringle, *Science Fiction: The 100 Best Novels*, p.14

than American. But the general run is so firmly American that British science-fiction writers will often fabricate American backgrounds and fill their dialogue with what they believe to be American idioms. (Compare the British ‘tough’ thriller, at any rate on its lower levels.)⁵⁶

The context of science fiction had moved almost entirely from Europe to America, largely because the dominant source of genre texts had become the American magazines, in particular John W. Campbell’s *Astounding Science-Fiction*. Like Amis and his “YANK MAGAZINES: *Interesting Reading*”,⁵⁷ Arthur C. Clarke recalled being introduced to the genre by American magazines, specifically the November 1928 *Amazing Stories*, which was the first that he saw, and the March 1930 *Astounding Stories*, which was the first that he owned.⁵⁸ These magazines were brought across from the United States as ballast on cargo ships, meaning that the selection of magazines was fairly random, including science fiction alongside “Westerns, the True Confessions, the *Thrilling Detectives*”.⁵⁹ There was thus no guarantee that any given issue of a particular magazine would reach Britain; while there were British subscribers to the American magazines, the general interested reader, as opposed to the fan prepared to pay for a transatlantic subscription, would have a hard time ensuring access to science fiction. It also meant that the genre was generally perceived as cheap and populist, which it was, but that any quality material published in these magazines required effort to track down. No wonder that early science fiction fans frequently came to see themselves as set apart from the normal run of life; in Britain, indeed, anywhere apart from the US, it took effort and dedication to be a fan.

It is in this context that *Mystery Story* is listed in the *Radio Times* as “A new American play”.⁶⁰ The play’s description in that listing notes only that “The action takes place in the United States of America”, while “The Talk of the Week” had a mention of the play emphasising that “*Mystery Story* is set in America and, with the exception of Maurice Colbourne who has spent many years in Canada and the

⁵⁶ Amis, *New Maps of Hell*, footnote, p.13

⁵⁷ Amis, *New Maps of Hell*, p.7

⁵⁸ Clarke, Arthur C., *Astounding Days* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1990) p.11

⁵⁹ Clarke, *Astounding Days*, p.20

⁶⁰ Programme listing, *Radio Times*, 15 August 1952, p.38

United States, all the principal parts will be played by Americans or Canadians.”⁶¹

So why this emphasis on the play as American, particularly as there is nothing in the action of the drama which demands that it be set in the United States?

The answer seems to lie with the association of America with genre pieces, particularly Westerns, “tough guy” thrillers and science fiction. It is as if these sort of genre texts were considered acceptable only with the introduction of an element of foreignness, as if there were something un-British about them. As with travellers’ tales, this spatial distancing allows for an acceptance of fantastic events that would not be so widely accepted if they were depicted as happening here, wherever “here” may be. It is all very well for Sir John Mandeville or Odysseus to encounter Cyclops, but only as a result of travelling to a distant land. Similarly, the bizarre events of *R.U.R.*, *Take Back Your Freedom*, *The Time Machine*, *Summer Day’s Dream*, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *No Smoking!* or *Mystery Story* can only take place at some sort of spatial or temporal remove.

The play listing for *Mystery Story* is accompanied by an illustration with a comment from “L.H.”, presumably Lionel Hale, the *Radio Times* drama critic. It is this image and its accompanying text that provide the only generic pointers for this play. Like the viewer whose published letter praised the play, Hale relates the production to scientific romances, specifically invoking Verne and Wells, due to the “plot based on the Space-Time Continuum and the impenetrability of natural forces”.⁶² The emphasis on the telescope in the foreground of the accompanying illustration also serves as a generic indicator, suggesting the scientific, if not necessarily science-fictional, setting. But Hale is also at pains to point out the mystery elements of the play, both by referring to it directly as a mystery and by emphasising the dead body. There are also horror elements at play here, suggested by the statement that the image of the body “might cause something of a shock to the television audience – it is comforting to think that the children will be in bed.”⁶³ This multiplication of generic indicators in order to appeal to a multiplicity of audiences seems to operate in the way indicated by Altman’s analysis of Hollywood marketing,

⁶¹ The Scanner, “Talk of the Week”, *Radio Times*, 15 August 1952, p.36

⁶² Hale, Lionel, “Mystery Story”, *Radio Times*, 15 August 1952, p.38

⁶³ Hale, “Mystery Story”, p.38

as cited above. But if the intention of using this multiplicity of generic signifiers was to broaden the appeal of the play, it is curious that the romantic plot element was not mentioned, the “scientific-romantic” description presumably using “romance” in its meaning of a fantasy or fiction rather than as something concerned with a romance between two people. This suggests that there was no conscious intention to expand the appeal of the play, beyond possibly indicating that it contained “scientific-romantic” elements, and that part of the purpose of Hale’s piece was to provide warning of the horrific content. Considering the popularity of mysteries in the 1940s and 1950s, particularly amongst the middle-brow,⁶⁴ a play entitled *Mystery Story* could expect to gain a wide audience, so Hale’s piece was less promotional than a warning intended to pre-empt complaints from viewers about fantastic or horrific content.

⁶⁴ Arthur Marwick writes that, “Among middle-brow readers the most popular genre was that of the detective story. Agatha Christie, the leading practitioner, even had the endorsement of Labour’s middle-brow Prime Minister, Clement Attlee.” Marwick, *British Society Since 1945*, p.83



Figure 6: *Mystery Story* comment, Radio Times, 15 August 1952, p.38

Mystery Story deals with the mysterious death of mathematician LeNormand, burned to death in his chair in a university observatory without the chair, the papers that he was working on, or even his clothes being damaged. Two of LeNormand's ex-students, Bark and Jerry, discover the body and become involved in the investigation, which leads nowhere. Jerry becomes involved with, and soon marries, LeNormand's mysterious young wife, Selena. It is ultimately revealed that Selena is the spirit of a being from the future who is inhabiting the body of a young woman; Selena had realised that LeNormand was working on mathematical theories that

would lead humans to develop knowledge which they could not handle, so she decided to use her mental powers to hurt him in order to dissuade him from continuing his research. Unfortunately, she chose to do so on the night of a big football game which took place next door to LeNormand's observatory, and the emotion at the field acted as a lens for her psychic projection, enhancing its power so that the mathematician combusted. When Jerry continues LeNormand's researches and refuses to give up, she manipulates him into committing suicide, explains everything to Bark, and then leaves.

This is undoubtedly a science fiction story, with the mystery of the title only being solvable by recourse to the pseudo-science of psychic powers, which was gaining in popularity at the time, with Peter Nicholls calling 1953-1963 "the decade in which the ESP story seemed to be edging all other forms of sf off the bookshelves."⁶⁵ This production was adapted for television by Nigel Kneale, who, despite his low opinion of work such as translating stage plays for the screen, would go on to utilise a number of ideas from this play in his original scripts. The focussing of psychic power in groups of people is one idea that he would return to more than once, including the mass "Wild Hunt" of *Quatermass and the Pit* (1958) and the collection of people at sporting grounds and other traditional congregation points in *Quatermass* (1979), where their presence sends a focussed and magnified psychic signal out into space, echoing the emotional lens of the crowd at the football ground in *Mystery Story*. The concept of possession by an alien intelligence recurs in *The Quatermass Experiment* (1953), *Quatermass II* (1955), *Quatermass and the Pit* and, to some extent, in *Halloween III: Season of the Witch* (1982). Their usefulness in relation to representing concerns over loss of identity, social cohesion and the dangers of mob rule and the uncivil society appear to have been just too great. This appropriation and these uses of these concepts will be discussed further in **Section Three**, but what is interesting is that Kneale identified their utility as metaphors and for social commentary despite the fact that *Mystery Story* does not use them in this way at all. *Mystery Story* is very much an escapist science fiction genre piece, introducing an idea and developing it without any real connection of the idea or its

⁶⁵ Nicholls, Peter, "ESP" in Nicholls, Peter (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (London: Granada, 1981) p.200

developments to contemporary society or to the real lives of the viewers. The same was not true of the next production under consideration, *Number Three*.

Number Three (1953)

The 1953 play *Number Three* is associated with science fiction by the *Radio Times*, but not directly labelled as such. An article accompanying the broadcast notes that the play's author, Charles Irving, "has always been interested in science fiction and is a keen admirer of the great proponents of this art, from H.G.Wells to Ray Bradbury."⁶⁶ The same article notes that "He thinks that 'detective' and 'scientific' fiction have one important thing in common - the quality of fantasy. 'Though the things they describe couldn't really happen,' he says, 'it is great fun to believe that they might.'"⁶⁷ As this play is a largely realist examination of the conflicts of interest and morals at a nuclear research station where researchers discover that their experiments in energy-generation are wanted more for their potential use as a bomb, this association of the play with "fun" and "fantasy" seems to be a technique of disarming the serious issues contained within the drama in order to comfort the reader. It also seems at odds with another article on the production, which notes that:

The conflicts of characters and consciences, the ethical questions they ask themselves and each other, the human emotional problems that affect some of the answers, should result in stimulating and provocative television, with a tingling, high-tension climax.⁶⁸

Adapted by Nigel Kneale and George Kerr, the two members of the recently-formed BBC Script Unit, from a play by Charles Irving, *Number Three* is concerned with the moral struggle within a team of scientists developing a new form of nuclear reactor. In particular, it discusses the morality of developing a new way of generating power for industry and individuals, when that method can also be adapted to produce an even more destructive bomb than those already available. It does this by forcing the issue, as the agreeably ramshackle research establishment shown at the start of the play undergoes an inspection by a government representative, with the result that the establishment is put under high security with orders to produce a

⁶⁶ The Scanner, "Twenty-One Years Non-Stop", *Radio Times*, 30 January 1953, p.15

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Hurren, Kenneth A., "Number Three" listing, *Radio Times*, 30 January 1953, p.14

bomb. Theoretical discussions on the morality of the research suddenly become actual, current issues for the members of staff.

Number Three, like *No Smoking!*, is science fiction in that it deals with the consequences of a scientific development, although here the consequences under consideration are of the moral rather than an economic kind. Although one of the scientists, Robert, claims that, “Number Three [the test reactor] isn’t a bomb! It’s a source of cheap power for industry”,⁶⁹ they are proven wrong at the end of the play, when the reactor is turned into a bomb by one of the scientists who has been overtaken by moral qualms, with the aim of destroying the research establishment and irradiating the nearby village in order to make public the development of these weapons. The technology discussed in the play was not itself excessively far-fetched, although the talk of nuclear fusion rather than fission places it firmly into the realm of science fiction for the 1950s, and even for now. Although the specifics were beyond those for the nuclear reactors being developed in Britain at the time, by the time that *Number Three* was broadcast in February 1953 construction on Windscale nuclear power station had already been underway for seven years and Calder Hall, Britain’s first nuclear power station, was just three years away from going operational. In addition, the decision had been taken in 1947 that Britain would have its own nuclear deterrent, and the plant at Windscale was an integral part of the development of that deterrent through its production of fissile material, so the question of military involvement with nuclear research on British soil was a current one, with particular emphasis on the relationship between research for civil and for military purposes.

So *Number Three* is science fiction because it deals with the potential consequences of a scientific innovation that was beyond the capabilities of science at the time of the play’s writing. It also fits neatly into the science fiction tradition of commenting on current events and social issues through a veneer of futurity, the same veneer that *No Smoking!* adopted in order to avoid the assumption that its depiction of the Cabinet was a comment on the then-current Government. In this case that veneer of futurity is very thin, with the issues essentially being addressed

⁶⁹ Kneale, Nigel, George Kerr and Charles Irving, *Number Three* Camera Script, held by BBC WAC, p.10

directly: the relationship between nuclear power and nuclear weapons was in the public eye at the time and there is no indication in the script that the setting is in the future beyond the level of nuclear technology described, and that would only be immediately obvious to a specialist in the field. What the play supports is the idea that these developments should be discussed publicly rather than kept secret, and particularly that the people working on them should stop to consider and talk about the implications of their work rather than simply focussing on the current technical issues. The viewpoint is made clear by Simpson, a researcher who had been fired from the project because of his beliefs that the work would be militarised:

It's a thing which everybody should discuss. You don't see it – any of you. If you think about it at all, you confuse the issues. But you know what will happen – if you make this lithium bomb someone, someday, will use it. It's inevitable -⁷⁰

Simpson is the most strident in his questioning of the morality of the research undertaken at the establishment, and he is depicted as being almost frantic in his feelings, with his commitment to that viewpoint illustrated by his decision to leave research and take up a job as a travelling salesman for a publishing firm, while volunteering at a mission. This latter in particular points to the Christian faith underlying his moral questions. But he is also depicted as weak, easily fooled, showing that characters in the play are more than simply ciphers standing in for particular points of view, as his belief that the development of a bomb was inevitable is shown to be correct, even if he is then tricked into believing that this is not actually happening.

It is Maureen who takes up Simpson's call to consider the ethical aspects of the research, and she is considered by the male scientists to be conflicted because she is a woman who is also a scientist, and that means a conflict between being emotional, as a woman "should be", and being rational. Maureen becomes the moral, questioning voice, but she is treated more as an object of desire than as a fellow scientist by the men on the staff, with Robert wanting to marry her and Crampton kissing her and trying to take her away for the weekend. Her moral choice ultimately

⁷⁰ Kneale, Kerr and Irving, *Number Three*, p.38. Incidentally, Simpson was played by Peter Cushing, who would later perform in Kneale's scripts for *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (BBC, 1954) and *The Creature* (BBC, 1955).

leads her to an act of sabotage which results in Hollies' death, which suggests that a scientist having moral qualms is a liability, as Maureen had already suggested, saying, "these security regulations - they don't just have to guard against spies, but against people's consciences".⁷¹ This statement foreshadows Maureen's actions, but also raises an issue in that her actions show that these security regulations are right because her act of conscience leads to a death.

Simpson also picks up on the common science fiction theme of tampering with nature, a moralistic theme which relates particularly to the Gothic strand of science fiction stemming from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* (1818). Indeed, Hollies makes the direct connection when describing to Maureen how the atomic researchers are perceived by the general public: "I'm Frankenstein, and you're Dracula's Daughter!"⁷² Maureen makes another possible connection to Frankenstein when she reveals her sabotage, saying that "This thing must be wiped out before it's born",⁷³ giving metaphorical life to the reactor, making Number Three the monster of the story.

This association of the nuclear research with horror images reflects the close connection between the science fiction and horror genres in the public mind, particularly as associated with the British science fiction of writers like Wells and Kneale. This would later be exemplified in *Doctor Who*, where the focus, at least with the revived series, has been in balancing scares with being family-friendly, as is most clearly shown by their declaration of a "Fear Factor" on the official website for each episode, decided by a family of four children.⁷⁴ However, while there is a strong identification of horror-science fiction as being particularly British, there are American productions which make similar connections, from the writings of H.P. Lovecraft to the atomic monster and alien invasion films of the 1950s, many of which are coded as science fiction but which can also be understood as horror, as, for example, Mark Jancovich has done in *Rational Fears: American Horror in the*

⁷¹ Kneale, Kerr and Irving, *Number Three*, p.46

⁷² Kneale, Kerr and Irving, *Number Three*, p.3

⁷³ Kneale, Kerr and Irving, *Number Three*, p.67

⁷⁴ Fear Forecasts for the revived *Doctor Who* seasons before the current one can be accessed at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/doctorwho/episodes/fearforecast.shtml> while current season ones are linked from the individual episode guides

1950s, which deals with such horror texts as Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* (fix-up novel 1950, from short stories published 1946-1950) and the films *The War of the Worlds* (1953) and *Forbidden Planet* (1956). This run of science fiction-horror in the 1950s suggests a growing ease with the trappings of the future and the presence of technology, combined with a fear of what that technology is capable of and how its introduction changes society.

Conclusions

The variety of early science fiction in television is by now clear. Narratives could be set in the Victorian past, or in the far future (or both, in the case of *The Time Traveller*), but more commonly in the present or the near future. While they could be comedy, like *No Smoking!*, serial thriller, like "Stranger From Space", or pastoral idyll, like *Summer Day's Dream*, they were generally concerned with social issues. Of particular interest were concerns regarding labour (seen in *R.U.R.*, *The Time Machine* and *Summer Day's Dream*) and industry (as in *R.U.R.*, *Summer Day's Dream* and *No Smoking!*) as well as Britain's changing status, covered in *Take Back Your Freedom*, *Summer Day's Dream*, *No Smoking!*, *Stranger From Space* and *Number Three*. The issue of control and exploitation of science and technology occurs in all of the programmes discussed above, with the exception of *Take Back Your Freedom*. This shows that there is an identifiable, overlapping set of themes and settings which can be considered to constitute a genre: British television science fiction.

These productions take place at a turning point in the BBC's production of science fiction programming, in that at least some parts of the company were now clearly aware of science fiction as a genre. They also appear at a period when the genre of science fiction was becoming more widely recognised throughout the media, replacing the earlier European genre of scientific romance with a new American-based interpretation. This change in awareness stems at least in part from the boom in science fiction book publishing which occurred in the 1950s on both sides of the Atlantic, making more visible, particularly in Britain, a genre which had previously been largely focussed on magazine publication or which had appeared without the genre label. However, the origin of many of these stories was

identifiably American, to the extent that British writers would attempt to adopt American styles, largely in the hope of improving their chances of acceptance within the larger market. So this was a time of change and mutability in the science fiction genre in Britain, and the productions discussed in this chapter illustrate this through the range of uses of science fiction that they present.

No Smoking! is a rather British use of the satirical possibilities of the genre, presenting the economic and social effects of a scientific development, while focussing on its identity as a comedy rather than a science fiction piece because that was its dominant mode and the most recognisable and popular genre to attach to it at the time. The generic position of *Mystery Story* was emphasised through its labelling and positioning as an American play with an American setting and cast, while its escapist genre science fiction attributes were presented without any particular consideration of their effect on society, making this basically a science fiction horror story. *Number Three*, on the other hand, focussed its attention on the question of the responsibilities of scientists, situating itself as a drama, with its retrospective identification with science fiction coming from its projection of technology beyond what was possible at the time of writing and its consideration of the implications of the technology, aspects also found in *No Smoking!* From comedy through horror to social drama, the range of science fiction is illustrated by these productions, including the range of seriousness with which the genre was used.

Chapter Four:

The BBC Versus Science Fiction: Acceptance and Opposition in Genre Terms

One of the first things that becomes clear in researching early British television science fiction is the difficulty of identifying productions as “science fiction”, as very few were identified by that term in publicity or production material. This is the case even though the term existed in American magazines at least, spreading into novel publishing and film criticism and production throughout the period from the 1930s through the 1950s. This raises the question of why this term was not used by the BBC. In line with Jason Mittell’s work on television genre, this chapter examines how the genre of “science fiction” developed in “broader cultural circulation”¹ by investigating various media, including magazines and radio, together with commentaries and histories, both popular and academic, which illuminate this development. It uses this material to examine how the international development of a genre, science fiction, impacted on the production, promotion and development of science fiction drama on early BBC television.

“Scientific Romance”, “Science Fiction” and Matters of Definition

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, by the mid-1950s the BBC Television Service had produced a number of programmes that can be understood as science fiction. Yet the BBC labelled none of these as such at the time. Instead, the preference was to associate these productions with the European “scientific romance” genre, labelling them “Wellsian fantasies” or similar. The BBC avoided the term “science fiction” not only with regard to television, but also in describing radio programmes, with *Spaceways* (1952) described as “A story of the very near future”,² showing a very similar formulation to that used for *Journey Into Space* (1953-1956), which was described as “A tale of the future”.³ This choice of and

¹ Mittell, Jason, *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004) p.4

² Anon., *Spaceways* programme listing, *Radio Times*, 25 January 1952, p.31

³ Anon., *Journey Into Space* programme listing, *Radio Times*, 18 September 1953, p.19

differentiation between genre labels reflected concerns about Americanisation and cultural hierarchies that were current during the period.

The issue of these negative feelings towards genres extends beyond specific genres such as horror or science fiction and into the very concept of genre itself. The Aristotelean genres of “epic poetry, tragedy, comedy, dithyrambic poetry, and most forms of flute and lyre playing”⁴ were approved of because of their Classical origins as a classification method, usually used as epic, tragedy or comedy alone, disregarding their origins in poetry and particularly poetry related to music. However, the “new”, or at least non-Classical, genres, such as science fiction, horror or Westerns, were perceived as being modern, and particularly associated with formulaic, even mass-produced narratives. Such an association would have been supported by the specialisation of the pulp magazines, which, as David Reed has shown, concentrated on narrower fields of fiction than the general magazines of the time, sometimes very narrow fields:

as is indicated by such titles as *Ranch Romances*, or *Ace-High Magazine*, which excluded everything but stories of First World War aerial encounters. The comic books, when they came along, frequently took this concept even further, confining their attention to just one character, such as *Hooded Horseman* or the most obvious, *Superman*. In this instance, one gets a clear insight into one of the roots of such behaviour: the need for reassurance. The repetitive format reassures its audience in the way that a mother reading or telling a story to her child over and over again reassures the infant that there is a base of reliability and predictability that can be touched in a dangerous and unstable world. In a life of mixed fortunes, the individual needs a reliable womb of conceits in which to rest its imagination and rejuvenate its will.⁵

While indicating the appeal of the repetitive nature of genres, this also suggests one of the reasons why broadcasters such as the BBC would have been disinclined to use genre labels. Indeed, the reason is held within the very word **broadcaster**: while they may have acknowledged and appealed to specific, minority audiences at various points in their schedules, the BBC’s productions were intended to appeal to and provide for as broad an audience as possible. Using genre labels

⁴ Aristotle, *Poetics* in Preminger, Alex, Leon Golden, O.B. Hardison Jr. and Kevin Kerrane (eds), *Classical Literary Criticism: Translations and Interpretations* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1974) p.108

⁵ Reed, David, *The Popular Magazine in Britain and the United States 1880-1960* (London: The British Library, 1997) p.197

would specify too closely the particular appeal of a production, and thereby label it as being for a particular audience rather than a general one. It would indicate that the production followed the formula related with that genre, which would also suggest that it was formulaic and therefore lacking in originality.

However, Aristotle's basic conception of genre does not differ greatly from the modern concept. Aristotle considered the genres about which he was writing:

to be, in general, imitations, [which] differ from each other in three ways: either because the imitation is carried on by different means or because it is concerned with different kinds of objects or because it is presented, not in the same, but in a different manner.⁶

Compare this with Barry Keith Grant's definition of genre films as those "which, through repetition and variation, tell familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations."⁷ What does differ is the sense of legitimacy lent to a genre by its age, which is why many histories of science fiction attempt to trace its origins back through the centuries, a tendency which Kingsley Amis considered "marks the attainment of a kind of puberty in the growth of a mode or style".⁸ In other words, this recounting of ancestry is part of a need to establish an identity and a place in the world, to establish legitimacy, as a youth has to establish their own sense of identity and legitimacy and declare their rights to their place in the world. However, such declarations can be seen as brash and their legitimacy questioned, as is seen in the response to the arrival of the new American "science fiction" as opposed to established, European "scientific romance."

The first issue is to investigate if there is any actual differentiation between "scientific romance" and "science fiction", or whether they do refer to exactly the same genre. The scientific romance as a nameable genre emerged in British magazine writing in the late 19th Century, referring to both speculative fiction and speculative non-fiction. This material was published in general interest rather than specialist magazines. While the label was applied to Wells' early, more fantastic fiction, he himself preferred the label of "Fantastic and Imaginative Romances" in lists of his works. However, in 1933 an omnibus edition was released of Wells' early

⁶ Aristotle, "Poetics" in Preminger *et al*, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p.108

⁷ Grant, Barry Keith, *Film Genre Reader III* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007) p.xv

⁸ Amis, Kingsley, *New Maps of Hell* (London: Four Square, 1963) p.21

novels under the title, apparently approved by the author, *The Scientific Romances of H.G. Wells*.⁹

The problem of differentiation between “scientific romance” and “science fiction” is reinforced by the publication of the same anthology in the United States, retitled as *Seven Famous Science Fiction Novels*, to Wells’ dislike. The term “science fiction” was first used by Hugo Gernsback in 1929 to refer to the kind of stories that he included in his pulp magazine *Amazing Stories*. Gernsback defined these stories as “the Jules Verne, H. G. Wells and Edgar Allan Poe type of story -- a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision”.¹⁰ So the people who were defining “science fiction” as a genre considered Wells, Verne, Poe and other acknowledged writers of “scientific romances” as writers of “science fiction”. Which returns us to the question of whether there is an actual difference between the labels or not.

Arguably, the difference is in the associations of the two labels. Brian Stableford has suggested that “scientific romance”:

remains useful as a means of highlighting the clear distinction that existed between the British and American traditions of speculative fiction until the massive importation of American sf into Britain in the wake of World War II brought them together in irredeemable confusion.¹¹

However, when studying material from the 1930s to 1950s it becomes clear that there is a shift in acceptance and usage of terms, and that the idea of “science fiction” and the associations with that label are different from those relating to “scientific romance”, even though it is very difficult to be specific about those differences. Brian Attebery has suggested that there is a disjunction between the literary “scientific romance” and the magazine “science fiction”, despite the connections drawn between the two by editors such as Gernsback. Attebery sees more connections to the “popular science and formula fiction parentage” of the magazine “science fiction” story than to the works of writers like Wells, Verne and

⁹ See Leon Stover, *Science Fiction From Wells to Heinlein* (London: McFarland & Company, 2002)

¹⁰ April 1926 issue of *Amazing Stories*, Quoted in: Brian Stableford, John Clute and Peter Nicholls, “Definitions of SF”, in Peter Nicholls (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (London: Orbit/Little, Brown and Company, 1993) pp. 311-314.

¹¹ Stableford, Brian, “Scientific Romance”, *The A to Z of Science Fiction Literature* (Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2005) p.306

Poe.¹² This would suggest that the science fiction stories were more generic, in the sense that the feeling of repetition and familiarity was strong from one story to the next, and that the narratives would also have some sense of being educational about the possibilities of science and technology.

Another key difference lies in the ghettoisation of “science fiction”, situating it as a thing apart, where “scientific romance” was more generally popular. This ghettoisation stems from a number of different but interacting attitudes and continues to inform attitudes to science fiction to this day. Pierre Bourdieu has described “middle-ground” arts, including science fiction and jazz, as being “disdained or neglected by the big holders of educational capital” and thereby offering:

a refuge and a revenge to those who, by appropriating them, secure the best return on their cultural capital (especially if it is not fully recognised scholastically) while at the same time taking credit for contesting the established hierarchy of legitimacies and profits.¹³

This understanding places science fiction as a tension point between classes and levels of education. To the cultural arbiters of taste, for the BBC to produce genre science fiction, and to label it as such, would be an admission that the television service was, at least in part, middlebrow.

It would be acceptable for children, who are still gaining their cultural capital and so can be accepted as occasional viewers of science fiction or Westerns, which explains why “Stranger From Space” is the most obviously science fiction production in this section. A mainstream production admitting its middlebrow status, however, would be more problematical, particularly in a period when television was, firstly, re-establishing itself and then coming under the threat of competition. Nevertheless, while the service may, in general, have wanted to **appear** more “cultured”, the BBC’s own viewer surveys had shown that:

whereas 57 per cent. of those families which possessed TV sets when the Television Service was resumed in 1946 were well-to-do or upper middle class and the remaining 43 per cent. lower middle or working class, the

¹² Brian Attebery, “The magazine era: 1926-1960” in Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) p.34

¹³ Bourdieu, Pierre (trans. Richard Nice), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984) p.87

corresponding proportions of 1948 buyers were 39 per cent. and 61 per cent.¹⁴

This suggests a disconnect between the BBC's understanding of their television audience and the actuality. However, this can also be understood to show that the BBC were keen to act as an "improving" force, leading the audience up the cultural pyramid, or that there was a simple resistance within the Television Service to "sinking" to the popular level. The Service might produce popular programming informed by "lower middle or working class" tastes, but they did not have to label it as such. This avoidance of genre terms can, therefore, be understood as a way of maintaining the appearance of being a "higher" culture medium, while the content of television corresponded more to the increasingly middle-class, middlebrow audience.

As Attebery notes, there was a formulaic aspect to the magazine "science fiction" which helped to deny it wider literary respectability. However, the ghettoisation was also driven by the writers and fans of the magazine "science fiction", as the distinctions between the categories of creator and consumer were broken down by the editors of the magazines through writing competitions and the promotion of interaction through their magazine letter columns. This interaction extended beyond the letter columns, developing not only into personal correspondences, but also into the formation of fan clubs and conventions, while some fans, including John W. Campbell, Arthur C. Clarke and John Beynon Harris, better known as John Wyndham, became professional editors and writers themselves.

However, many of those who took up writing did not have the originality or skill of these individuals, and ultimately continued to reproduce the formulae of the stories that dominated the magazines. In this way, the fans separated themselves off from dominant culture, by recirculating their formulaic narratives, by creating their own clubs and societies which thereby excluded the dominant culture. This separation worked the other way as well; when more literary writers took up the ideas of "science fiction", or when more establishment figures considered the

¹⁴ Silvey, Robert, Head of Listener Research, BBC, "An Enquiry Into Television Viewing", *B.B.C. Quarterly*, Vol. IV, No.4, Winter 1949-50, p.231

prototypes of modern “science fiction”, the connections were rejected. As Arthur Koestler put it in a BBC Home Service talk:

Swift’s *Gulliver*, Huxley’s *Brave New World*, Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are great works of literature because in them the oddities of alien worlds serve merely as a background or pretext for a social message. In other words, they are literature precisely to the extent to which they are not science fiction, to which they are works of disciplined imagination and not of unlimited fantasy.¹⁵

These views clearly illustrate that the definition of “science fiction” as being culturally lacking in value was self-reinforcing: anything that was “good” art could not be science fiction, and anything that was “science fiction” could not be good art. Koestler applies the same limitations to other genre fiction, declaring that the detective novels of Georges Simenon “become works of art precisely at the point where character and atmosphere become more important than the plot, where imagination triumphs over invention.”¹⁶ This differentiation between genre fiction as a whole and “art” is indicative of the conflict between popular and “high” culture that can be seen in a range of cultural discourses and events in the period.

By this stage of the 1950s, Koestler is talking about science fiction novels as well as magazine science fiction. David Pringle has claimed that:

it was in 1948-1949 that major publishers began to issue science fiction novels which were labelled as such. [...] In Britain, it took a little longer for the public to become aware of sf as a book-publishing category; nevertheless, ‘science fiction’ seems to have become a widely-used term in the early 1950s.¹⁷

This indicates one reason that the term “science fiction” was not as widely used as it might have been by the BBC in the early-to-mid 1950s. While the term had been in circulation and was known through the science fiction magazines and contacts with American culture (Orwell uses Gernsback’s initial phrase “scientifiction” in his 1939 essay “Boy’s Weeklies”),¹⁸ it was not as widely accepted as it would become. The use of the phrase “science fiction” as a classification on book jackets would have helped to spread the term and increase familiarity with it amongst the general public.

¹⁵ Koestler, Arthur, “The Boredom of Fantasy”, *The Listener*, 28 May 1953, p.893

¹⁶ Koestler, “The Boredom of Fantasy”, p.183

¹⁷ Pringle, David, *Science Fiction: The 100 Best Novels* (London: Xanadu Publications, 1985) p.14

¹⁸ Orwell, George, “Boys’ Weeklies”, *Essays* (London: Penguin, 2000) p.92

But it is significant that the novel which launched this category in Britain, according to David Pringle, was John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* (1951), a novel which Christopher Priest has argued succeeded because Wyndham broke away from the American idiom in science fiction and instead wrote books which "are comedies of English manners,"¹⁹ making them more appealing to the middle-class, middlebrow mass-market than to a narrower, more specific science fiction market.

Within this wider cultural conflict between "popular" and "high" culture there is an overarching conflict between American and European culture, in which America comes to represent the "popular" opposed to European "high" culture, which is emphasised by the way that the term "science fiction" was introduced into Britain. This ties in with questions of quality, and thereby matters of taste and class, alongside associations with different genres and media. The arrival of the term "science fiction" in Britain was not orchestrated, despite the effort that Gernsback and other editors had put into creating a label to identify their particular kind of stories in the crowded American fiction magazine market. Ships travelling from America to Britain in the interwar years were often ballasted with these pulp magazines, which were then sold through stores such as Woolworth's. In his critical study of science fiction, *New Maps of Hell*, Kingsley Amis remembered:

I have been a devotee of science fiction ever since investigating, at the age of twelve or so, a bin in the neighbourhood Woolworth's with the label YANK MAGAZINES: Interesting Reading. Those stories of twenty-five years ago, of course, with their exploitation of violence and horror, were as far below the level of contemporary science fiction as the music of the B.B.C. Dance Orchestra (which provided another key epiphany of that period) was below that of Louis Armstrong's Hot Five; but the first coverful of many-eyed and -tentacled monsters was enough assurance for me, as it must have been for thousands of others, that this was the right kind of stuff. This strongly suggests, at least, that what attracts people to science fiction is not in the first place literary quality in the accustomed sense of that term.²⁰

This memory shows that, in the mid-30s, when Amis would have been "twelve or so", the association of American genre science fiction was definitely with spectacle

¹⁹ Priest, Christopher, "British science fiction" in Patrick Parrinder (ed.), *Science Fiction: A critical guide* (London: Longman, 1979) p.194

²⁰ Amis, Kingsley, *New Maps of Hell* (London: Four Square, 1963) p.7. Brian Aldiss also remembers "The discovery of *Marvel*, *Amazing*, and *Astounding* on Woolworth's counter." Brian W. Aldiss, and Harry Harrison (eds), *Hell's Cartographers: Some Personal Histories of Science Fiction Writers* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1975) p.184

and exploitation and, through the dump-bin distribution through cheap-and-cheerful Woolworth's, with the lower classes and lack of quality.

The Threat of the New World

This slick, attractive but all-surface spectacle was associated strongly throughout the period with American products. Worse, commentators saw these developments as signs of a growing encroachment of American values onto British ones. Richard Hoggart commented that British-produced comics were adopting a “new manner”, including stories about “adventures in space-ships”, which was “derived from the American ‘strips’ and differing from the older English ones as a slick milk-bar differs from an unimproved fish-and-chips shop”.²¹ Considering Hoggart’s description of milk-bars as a hangout for juke-box girls and “boys aged between fifteen and twenty, with drape-suits, picture ties, and an American slouch”²² who “their clothes, their hair-styles, their facial expressions all indicate - are living in a myth-world compounded of a few simple elements which they take to be those of American life”,²³ he hardly sees this slickness and Americanisation as beneficial.

Hoggart was not alone. Arthur Koestler saw the publication of a series of science fiction novels and the formation of the British Science-Fiction Club in 1953 as a sign “that the new craze, a kind of cosmic jitterbug, has crossed the Atlantic.”²⁴

Nigel Kneale claimed that his 1953 television serial *The Quatermass Experiment*:

was supposed to be something of a critique of science fiction of the time, those terrible American films that were full of flag-waving and dreadful, crude dialogue and exhibited a singular lack of imagination and a total lack of interest in the characters.²⁵

The serial was also not referred to as “science fiction” in its listings in the *Radio Times* or in its title sequence, with both describing the serial as “A thriller in six parts”.

²¹ Hoggart, Richard, *The Uses of Literacy* (London: Penguin, 1992) p.217

²² *Ibid.*, p.248

²³ *Ibid.*, p.248

²⁴ Koestler, “The Boredom of Fantasy”, p.891

²⁵ Nigel Kneale quoted in Julian Petley, “The Manxman”, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, March 1989, p.91

However, producer Rudolph Cartier did recognise that he was working in an established and recognisable genre when he wrote to the Air Ministry to request the loan of some pressure suits to add authenticity to the production, stating, “I am preparing a ‘Science-Fiction’ Serial”.²⁶ The associations that were held with relation to “Science-Fiction” (and note that Cartier put that label in quotation marks, as if to imply a lack of legitimacy) are made clear when Cartier notes that “I am most anxious to lift this production above the level of strip-cartoons and magazine thrillers, and we have secured technical datae [sic] and scientific support from responsible quarters.”²⁷ While science fiction has frequently turned to claims of scientific and technical accuracy as a legitimising technique, the idea that authenticity was a key to lifting this television serial above the level of cheap and disposable fiction was clearly a strong one.

As well as being associated with cheap and superficial American cultural imports, the science fiction stories of the comics and magazines were associated with infantilism and lack of intelligence, with these associations being carried over into other appearances of the genre. These associations were not limited to science fiction, but to fantastic narratives in general. In a 1951 talk about comics on the Home Service, the Director of the Institute of Education at Nottingham University opined that:

these kinds of stories, both the old-fashioned and the new-fangled ones - deal with something that is not real. They deal with the past, or they deal with the future. They are romance, they are fantasy. They are the kind of romance, I agree, that appeals only to immature minds, to children and to young people, and to some adults who are perhaps not very intelligent.²⁸

Similar language was used in relation to the perceived threat of American horror comics, although discussions about these comics revealed that the concern was not limited to those containing genre horror but also science fiction, stories including drug abuse, gangsterism, and other “objectionable” matters. And the fears were not just in relation to corruption of morals, but also to the mind becoming

²⁶ Rudolph Cartier to C.Moodie, Air Ministry, 12 June 1953, BBC WAC T5/418

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Lewis, Michael, “Did You Hear That? Children’s Comics”, *The Listener*, 13 December 1951, p.1007

accustomed to not being challenged, a fear which extended to a number of media, as expressed by Dr Horace King to the Commons in 1954:

It may be that television, the film and the comic strip will win in the long run, and that mankind, which is just on the march towards literacy, may be allowed to slip back into a state in which there are more illiterates than literates. This conjures up for those with a belief in social democracy a more fearsome picture even than the horror comic itself, with comic strip election addresses and Frankenstein or Fascist legislation and legislators.²⁹

King also noted that “the horror comic transcends all class distinctions, all intelligence levels, all social and home conditions”,³⁰ emphasising the perniciousness of the threat, which could find its way into even the best of homes, and bring anyone down to its immoral, illiterate level.

As Martin Barker has shown with regard to the British horror comics campaign, the fears that drove the campaign were those of a loss of English character and heritage, “Englishness, good manners, proper English language, fine literature. People who have these things know instinctively that anything else is harmful.”³¹ But more importantly the fear was that the spread of American culture in particular removed the possibility of a resurgent Britain spreading its own cultural empire across the world, instead of an industrial or military one. In other words, the effective American cultural imperialism meant the end of a new British imperial future and the need to accept that Britain was no longer Great, but subservient.

The BBC Versus “Science Fiction”

With this dominant narrative of anti-Americanism, and particularly the sort of Americanism spread by popular culture, it is little wonder that a public service broadcaster with the remit of informing, educating and entertaining would be averse to the use of terms associated with this form of popular culture. To have admitted that the BBC was broadcasting “science fiction” or “Westerns” would have been to admit to spreading this pernicious American cultural propaganda and undermining British culture. As has already been shown, the one use of “science fiction” in the

²⁹ Horace King, *Hansard*, Commons, 30 November 1954, column 76

³⁰ *Ibid.*, column 77

³¹ Barker, Martin, *A Haunt of Fears: The Strange History of the British Horror Comics Campaign* (London: Pluto Press, 1984) p.82

Radio Times in direct relation to a programme before 1955 (the extent of my research) is an editorial heading given to two letters relating to the production *Mystery Story* in 1952. In addition to this, an interview with Charles Irving to accompany his 1953 play *Number Three* associated the play with science fiction, while not actually labelling it as such.

This avoidance of the genre term did ultimately come to an end. A 1955 article from the *Radio Times* promoting a forthcoming children's radio serial, *The Purple Comet*, uses the term "science fiction" twice, once capitalised and once uncapitalised but hyphenated, possibly indicating some lingering uncertainty over just how the phrase should be used. In the article, the author of the play still sees a need to offer up a sort of definition of the genre, indicating some concern that it may not be familiar to the audience:

You've all read science-fiction stories, I expect; in most of them an expedition of some sort is outward-bound through space to Mars, or Venus, or one of the nine [sic.] small or vast planets which, with our own Earth, endlessly circle the sun. That is all in the distant future. But why, in our own time, should there not be another sort of expedition? Coming to Earth – from somewhere *else*?³²

One explanation for this need for definition may be that this column was printed under the heading "For the Children", suggesting that it not only was related to the children's programming for that week, but that it was also intended to be read by the children. In this case, it is not unreasonable to give some sort of expanded idea of what sort of story may be involved, except that this narrative sets out, like *Stranger From Space* (BBC, 1951-1953) or *Quatermass II* (BBC, 1955), to explicitly invert the explorer motif of science fiction in favour of the alien incursion motif.

Instead, the relationship of science fiction to narratives of exploration connects it to contemporary American science fiction rather than nineteenth-century European scientific romance. This in turn connects to the idea of science fiction being a genre for the young and one which they circulate amongst themselves. This idea can be found in an article in the *Radio Times*, also from 1955, in which Dorothy Berry bemoans the way that her son, having started school, is no longer entertained

³² Hayes, Peter, "A Threat from Outer Space", *Radio Times*, 25 November 1955, p.8

by the narratives and activities which she draws from *Listen With Mother*, the radio children's programme which she and her son used to listen to together.

I had a perfectly good reason for continuing with *Listen With Mother*: it was to provide me with easy material for story telling. But, alas, Hugh had been introduced to space fiction in the school playground. Being a kindly child he listened politely as I recounted the sagas of the bunnies and kittens. He even listened to the doings of all those sweet children, with their eternally good-tempered mummies and daddies, who always laughed so heartily when the little tots jumped in muddy puddles or fell into streams. But as I drew lamely to a close, he would say thoughtfully 'What I can't understand is how the air-lock worked if the moon man left it at neutral ...' and I would know his mind was miles away in outer space.³³

So science fiction was perceived as having a more modern appeal, and one that was spread by the children themselves; it was the children's own fiction, as opposed to that selected for them by their parents. Berry's comments also paint "space fiction" as being more concerned with logic and technology than the emotional narratives of anthropomorphised animals and small children in amusing scrapes presented by *Listen With Mother*. It is the modern fiction of the technological age, not the whimsy of the Edwardian nursery.

This in turn can be seen as connected to the fears around American genre fictions as things that would negatively influence British culture through the younger generation. This was not a new fear, as is illustrated by George Orwell's "Riding Down to Bangor" from 1946, in which he writes:

English children are still Americanized by way of the films, but it would no longer be generally claimed that American books are the best ones for children. Who, without misgivings, would bring up a child on the coloured 'comics' in which sinister professors manufacture atomic bombs in the underground laboratories while Superman whizzes through the clouds, the machine-gun bullets bouncing off his chest like peas, and platinum blondes are raped, or very nearly, by steel robots and fifty-foot dinosaurs? It is a far cry from Superman to the Bible and the woodpile.³⁴

In this essay, Orwell is not only decrying the effects of these, as he perceives them, power fantasies on British children, but is also identifying this science fictional trend as a detrimental change in American literature for children. Orwell also recognises a

³³ Berry, Dorothy, "When Hugh Went to School", *Radio Times*, 25 March 1955, p.27

³⁴ Orwell, George, "Riding Down From Bangor" in *Essays* (London: Penguin, 2000) p.400

range of media influences that could be understood as damaging to British children, that they will receive the same Americanising influences through the cinema as they will through their exposure to comics and the associated new style of American children's fiction that he is arguing against.

The BBC's reticence around the use of genre labels to describe programmes for the young is not restricted to "science fiction"; another 1955 article describes the new children's serial *Lariat Boy* as "the first 'Wild Western' serial written for Children's Hour."³⁵ Throughout the article the terms "Wild Western" and "Western" are included in quotation marks, indicating a lack of legitimacy similar to that implied by Cartier's inclusion of the term "Science Fiction" in quotation marks in his letter to the Air Ministry quoted above. Even the mix of "Wild Western" and "Western" imply a degree of uncertainty and flux in the generic terminology, even though the term "Western" was used to describe a film genre as far back as the 1910s.³⁶ This suggests that the BBC, through the *Radio Times*, was still generally reticent about the use of popular genre terms at this stage.

Conclusions

This chapter has ranged across a variety of subjects in order to examine the reasons why the BBC Television Service did not refer to productions as "science fiction". It has indicated how the history of the term, stemming as it did from American pulp magazines, is a key source of a prejudice against its use. The associations which grew out of this history also counted against it, especially in an intellectual and cultural atmosphere predisposed against the influences of American popular culture. When considered alongside the needs of the BBC to appeal widely, the reasons against using the term "science fiction" become clear. At the same time, it is clear that the BBC made little use of genre terms at this time, in part because the term "science fiction" was still making its way into general usage in Britain during this period. However, there was also a general feeling within British culture of the time that genre fictions were not only less "tasteful" than "high" culture, but that they were actively pernicious.

³⁵ Dixon, Alan, "Redskins and Palefaces", *Radio Times*, 1 April 1955, p.21

³⁶ Altman, *Film/Genre*, p.36

Nevertheless, it is also clear that genre science fiction did influence BBC television dramas. This was sometimes in a sense of trying to avoid particular associations, as with *The Quatermass Experiment* and its striving to avoid the pitfalls of lack of characterisation or technical authenticity. At other times, the writers were untroubled by the association, as was the case with Charles Irving, because they were familiar with the genre and so could look beyond its negative connotations. Nevertheless, when the BBC Television Service adapted science fiction works, they were either canonical, as with Wells, Čapek and Orwell, or they were from established playwrights, or they were written expressly for television; none of the productions during this period were adapted from stories from the science fiction magazines. That would have brought the BBC far too close to the popular culture connections of the genre for its still largely middle-class audience.

Section Three: Televisual Revolutions

So far this thesis has shown how science fiction drama was used initially as a site of experimentation with the form and scope of television drama, only for the experimentation to be curtailed and the form standardised into the predominant aesthetic of the “intimate screen”. It has also shown the breadth of science fiction programming on British television before 1953, and discussed the ways that these programmes illustrate the ways that science fiction could be used as a locus for engaging with cultural concerns. The lack of use of the term “science fiction” was itself tied up with these cultural concerns, particularly with fears of Americanisation of British culture. This section brings these strands back together, as it deals with a proclaimed revolution in approach to television drama, breaking free from the perceived restrictions of the intimate screen in order to create greater impact on the audience.

However, the dramas at the centre of this change, *The Quatermass Experiment* (1953) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1954) were also themselves engaged in social commentary and became embroiled in issues of Americanisation and cultural change that were centred around particular genres. **“Sadists and Readers of Horror Comics”**: *The Quatermass Experiment, Nineteen Eighty-Four, the BBC, Middlebrow Culture and the Horror Comics Campaign* shows how the audience response to these Cartier / Kneale productions drew upon then current debates about popular culture, and particularly the effects of American popular culture on British children, focused around the campaign to ban American “horror” comics from Britain. **Reasons for Survival: Why Remember Quatermass?** challenges a series of claims surrounding *The Quatermass Experiment* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* which have established their places in the canon of British television by examining not only the reasons why the Quatermass character has had such a continued impact, but also by looking at other science fiction dramas from the period, *The Lost Planet* (1953) and *Time Slip* (1953), to consider why they are **not** remembered.

Chapter Five:

“Sadists and Readers of Horror Comics”: *The Quatermass Experiment, Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the BBC, Middlebrow Culture and the Horror Comics Campaign

It is significant that *The Quatermass Experiment* took the form of a six-part serial, rather than a single play, and that it was an original script for television, written by Nigel Kneale. It is also significant that the genre was science fiction, immediately signalling a departure from the prevailing naturalist orthodoxy. It is significant also that it was produced by Rudolph Cartier, an Austrian émigré who had worked in European cinema before joining the BBC in 1952. Between them, Kneale and Cartier were responsible for introducing a completely new dimension to television drama in the early- to mid-1950s. As Cartier later reflected in a 1990 television interview, “the BBC - they needed me like water in the desert”, and it is to the credit of Michael Barry that Cartier was given the opportunity and the freedom to shake up BBC television drama to the extent that he did, first with *The Quatermass Experiment* and then, the following year, with his production of George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.¹

The Quatermass Experiment and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* have both entered the canon of television drama for their innovation, as Lez Cooke indicates in the passage quoted above. Yet while *The Quatermass Experiment* was hailed as a success immediately, although with the accustomed few dissenting voices, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was vilified. The main focus of this chapter will be on the response to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and the way that this shows the taste formations surrounding television in relation to cultural fears focused around the campaign against American horror comics. This campaign has been closely investigated by Martin Barker, who identified it as being primarily driven by fears of the American threat to “Those very traditions that made for Britishness”,² particularly in the face of the declining power of Britain on the world stage.

The issue of taste, however, is not solely limited to the idea of Britishness. Pierre Bourdieu marked out the territory of the conflict of class tastes in broadcasting when he stated that “the dialectic of distinction and pretension designates as

¹ Cooke, Lez, *British Television Drama: a History* (London: BFi Publishing, 2003) p.20

² Barker, Martin, *A Haunt of Fears: The Strange History of the British Horror Comics Campaign* (London: Pluto Press, 1984) p.182

devalued ‘middle-brow’ art those legitimate works which become ‘popularized’³. Adaptations such as *The Time Machine* or *Nineteen Eighty-Four* would thus be considered devalued and middle-brow simply by reaching for a popular audience. However, the issue of taste is not just one of popularity, it is also one of the characteristics which make things popular. Bourdieu argues that “the working class and [...] the middle-class fractions least rich in cultural capital” are hostile “towards every kind of formal experimentation” and that “the popular audience delights in plots that proceed logically and chronologically towards a happy end, and ‘identifies’ better with simply drawn situations and characters”.⁴ Such taste formations would reject the complexities of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* together with its ending which, like that of many of the American horror comics, did not present a happy conclusion for the protagonists.

The Quatermass Experiment would be more acceptable to these middle-brow tastes, as it drove towards a more conventionally happy ending. It also presented a Britain that was still a vital player, one capable of being the first country to launch a manned space flight. The assistance of a German scientist on the project echoes the reliance on German rocketry developments at Peenemunde during the war under Wernher von Braun that was shown by both American and Soviet post-War rocket projects, but even then the character of Reichenheim is described as a “British subject”, subjugating his foreignness to British power. Indeed, James Chapman has seen the serial as sharing “a narrative of national achievement and progress [...] with films like *The Sound Barrier*”, in which British engineers are responsible for creating the first supersonic aircraft, a feat actually accomplished by the Americans.⁵ The narrative shows an alien threat to Britain which settles in an icon of the heart of the British nation, Westminster Abbey, site of the recent coronation of Queen Elizabeth II and of many before, as well as the traditional burial site for British monarchs before George II. This invader is then defeated by a British scientist who

³ Bourdieu, Pierre (trans. Richard Nice), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984) p.14

⁴ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p.32

⁵ Chapman, James, “*Quatermass* and the Origins of British Television SF” in John R. Cook and Peter Wright (eds), *British Science Fiction Television: A Hitchhiker’s Guide* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2006) p.29

does not use force against it, but who instead talks to it reasonably and makes emotional appeals to it which results in it destroying itself.

Such a reading of the serial would accept its thrills and horrors as obstacles in the path of a British hero reaching towards a very British victory. Indeed, this reading would be supported by one of Kneale's own comments on the serial, that:

in fact *The Quatermass Experiment* was supposed to be something of a critique of science fiction of the time, those terrible American films that were full of flag-waving and dreadful, crude dialogue and exhibited a singular lack of imagination and a total lack of interest in the characters.⁶

There is certainly a degree of very British distaste regarding American popular science fiction to be found in the serial, particularly in its inclusion of "Planet of the Dragons", a "3-D" science fiction film which espouses those very characteristics that Kneale despised, with American, or Americanised, characters planning to turn an alien world into somewhere, "just like home."⁷ *The Quatermass Experiment* can thus be understood as relating to a fear of Americanisation which would absorb British culture and distinctiveness and turn Britain into a place "just like home". This fear of the loss of British distinctiveness connects *The Quatermass Experiment* to the fears that drove the horror comics campaign.

While the producers of *The Quatermass Experiment* recognised it as a science fiction serial but labelled it as a "thriller", the press connected it to another genre. *News Chronicle* referred to it as a "'horror' serial",⁸ while *The News of the World* called it "TV's weekly hair-raiser".⁹ Yet this does not seem to carry the connotations that existed with regard to the connections made by viewers between *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the horror comic. In relation to *The Quatermass Experiment*, horror is not necessarily American, although science fiction may have been. Indeed, the connection between the BBC Television Service and the horror genre can be traced back to the first night of regular broadcasting, 2nd November 1936, which closed with two ghost stories told by Algernon Blackwood. These

⁶ Nigel Kneale quoted in Petley, Julian, "The Manxman" in *Monthly Film Bulletin*, March 1989, p.91

⁷ Kneale, Nigel, "Episode 4: Believed to Be Suffering", *The Quatermass Experiment* camera script, included on *The Quatermass Collection* DVD set, BBC, 2005, p.36

⁸ Thomas, James, "TV worried by 'horror' serial". *News Chronicle*, 19th August 1953

⁹ Anon., "The Terror Stops TV", *The News of the World*, 23rd August 1953

stories themselves were a connection between the new television service and the existing radio service, where Blackwood was already a regular contributor. It was not horror itself that was considered to be American, or even necessarily dangerous to the British character, but the rise of the horror comics campaign in 1954 provided a focus for those fears about loss of Britishness that Kneale had explored through science fiction in *The Quatermass Experiment* in the idea of children being exposed to particular expressions of the horror genre.

When the BBC Television Service broadcast the Nigel Kneale / Rudolph Cartier adaptation of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* on 12th December 1954, it sparked a major public and political response. The virulence of the negative responses was such that producer Rudolph Cartier requested additional studio attendants to act as security for the second performance of the play.¹⁰ Amongst the letters to Cartier from viewers was one claiming, on behalf of "thousands of viewers", that "the persons responsible for putting on the play are sadists & readers of horror comics."¹¹ Similar claims were made in the viewers' letters column of the *Radio Times*, where one respondent described the production as "a full scale 'horror comic'",¹² and another stated that "I thought it was a thousand times worse than the American comics."¹³ These particular responses connect the production explicitly to the horror comics scare that had arisen in America and spread to Britain, leading to discussions in the press and in Parliament about the threat of these comics. In doing so, they illustrate the interconnectedness of social concerns surrounding the media, and particularly the threat of Americanisation and the loss of British culture.

The adaptation was not alone in these accusations, with it being described by one letter writer as part of a run of Sunday dramas which were "sadistically high-brow",¹⁴ a phrase which suggests not just the horrific content of the production, but also a number of taste elements based around issues of class and education. A similar cry had been raised in a letter to the *Evening News* in 1950, where the complaint was

¹⁰ Memo, Rudolph Cartier to Mr Griffiths, 15th December 1954, BBC Written Archives Centre file T5/362/2.

¹¹ Letter, D.Hunt to Rudolph Cartier, 15th December 1954, BBC WAC file T5/362/2

¹² Davies, Rev.J.Anderson, "Viewers Views on ... '1984'", *Radio Times*, 31st December 1954, p.12

¹³ Bussin, Rachel, "Viewers Views on ... '1984'", *Radio Times*, 31st December 1954, p.12

¹⁴ D.Hunt to Rudolph Cartier, BBC WAC T5/362/2

made that “It seems inevitable on Sunday evenings that the television play is either unsuitable for younger members of the family or it is so highbrow that only a ‘gifted few’ can understand what it is all about.”¹⁵ The “high-brow” did not merely indicate intellectualism, and therefore a demand upon the viewer to think about what they had seen rather than engaging with the production on the level of relaxing entertainment. It also indicated ideas of difference from the “ordinary” viewer, suggesting that these plays, and by implication even television, were not “for” them. There is a separation of class which could even bring in the associations of sadism as an upper-class or aristocratic vice which can be traced back at least to deSade and his novels which show figures such as aristocrats and religious characters exercising extreme versions of their authority upon less culturally valued individuals. That *The Times* praised the television adaptation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* for bringing Orwell’s ideas to a wider audience than his 1949 novel had reached again indicates that this production was understood as being one requiring thought and comprehension, and therefore effort.¹⁶

Considering that BBC audience research had identified that, of two otherwise comparable households, the one with the lower level of education was the one most likely to have television,¹⁷ it is strongly suggested that the typical viewer saw their television drama as escapism rather than food for thought. Jan Bussell stated that the BBC responded:

with the deliberate lowering of the intellectual standard of programmes, to cater for a new viewing public. Many service gratuities were spent on the snobbery of possessing a television set. Here was an opportunity to offer a new cultural standard to the masses, who at the time were shaken out of their normal rut by years of war, and were ready for imaginative entertainment. It is against this background that a comparatively small band of producers and artists have miraculously made the B.B.C. television service artistically the best in the world.¹⁸

¹⁵ Hobbs, A.H., “Enough of these TV plays!”, *Evening News*, 8th March 1950

¹⁶ Anon., “Nineteen Eighty-Four and All That”, *The Times*, 16th December 1954, p.9

¹⁷ Silvey, Robert, “Viewers, Viewing and Leisure”, *BBC Quarterly*, Vol. VII, No.1, Spring 1952, p.33

¹⁸ Bussell, Jan, *The Art of Television* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952) p.12

For Bussell, people like Kneale and Cartier who tried to break away from the perceived norm, whether in television form or in writing challenging scripts, were a form of revolution against the dominant BBC view.

The drive to lower “the intellectual standard of programmes” should not be taken as meaning that television was increasingly catering to a lower-class audience, as the cost of television still meant that the middle-classes predominated in that audience. Post-war television in both the USA and Britain has been understood as supporting the “white, middle-class, home-owning family operating as a devolved unit of the patriarchal state.”¹⁹ It is this comfortable middle-class who were increasingly taste-arbiters for television, and their relative conservatism reflected their insecurity of identity, representing as they did an attempt to regain a British identity in the face of the changes which followed the Second World War. Janet Thumim saw “the manufacture of consensus around national identity” as:

a crucial feature of social discourse: pre-war society must be renewed in the brave new post-war world by the acknowledgement of a proud, united, stable and above all an homogenous national community.²⁰

It is important to note that this is not the metropolitan middle-class, with regular opportunities to encounter and engage with more challenging art and drama, but the suburban and, increasingly, the provincial middle-classes who have access to television. It is relevant here to recall the stereotype of the provincial middle-class, and also to remind ourselves of the pejorative use of the word “provincial” to mean “parochial or narrow-minded; lacking in education, culture or sophistication”.²¹ It is the “parochial or narrow-minded” way of thinking that Kneale and Cartier challenged and offended in their challenge, by moving outside the comfort of the status quo. This is underlined by an interview with a “BBC civil servant” that Kneale later recalled:

He said he was troubled about *Nineteen Eighty-Four* being controversial. It got into the press and bothered people and drew attention, and they didn't want that. So I said, “What exactly would you be happy with? What sort of

¹⁹ Thumim, Janet, “Introduction” in Janet Thumim (ed.), *Small Screens, Big Ideas: Television in the 1950s* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2002) p.7

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ “Provincial” definition 6 from *Oxford English Dictionary* online at <http://dictionary.oed.com>, accessed 12th November 2007

programmes would please you?" He said, "Oh, something that would cause no trouble nor attract attention. Not too good, and not too bad, but in the middle ..."²²

In challenging this comfortable "middle", by bothering people and drawing attention, Kneale and Cartier also returned to the question of the purpose of television which so interested people around the time of the launch of the television service. However, this time there was no guidance, no thought from officials at the top of the television service published in the *Radio Times* explaining their viewpoint on what television was for and what it was trying to do. Instead, the discourse to be found in the *Radio Times* and *The Listener* continued on its own way, not reacting to this challenge issued to television which urged the medium to engage more fully with society through its drama. While individual programmes may have been free to provide challenges to society, the BBC as a whole would not allow its public face or the conditions of its discourse to be dictated by a single programme within the entirety of the broadcast schedule.

Hunt's letter regarding *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which complained about the run of dramas, was also the one that gave the opinion that "the persons responsible for putting on the play are sadists & readers of horror comics", tying in to the fear over the import of American horror comics. In America, fears around the potential corrupting influence of comics were focussed by the publication of Dr Frederic Wertham's 1954 book *Seduction of the Innocent*, followed by Wertham's testimony to the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency led by Estes Kefauver. In Britain, questions were raised in Parliament from October 1954 regarding the importing of such materials, when:

Mr Rankin asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his attention has been directed to the nature of the contents of the American children's comics which are now being sold in this country; if he is aware that these periodicals have a demoralising effect on the minds of children, because they help to spread illiteracy and encourage sadistic practices; and if he will now take the necessary steps to prevent their circulation among children in the interests of sound education.²³

²² Nigel Kneale quoted in Andy Murray, *Into the Unknown: The Fantastic Life of Nigel Kneale* (London: Headpress, 2006) p.47

²³ *Hansard*, 21st October 1954, column 1376

Like Hunt's letter regarding *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Rankin also connects American comics with sadism, making explicit the link that Hunt made implicitly. The connection of the comics with sadism was also repeated on 11th November 1954, when:

Dr Stross asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether he has now given further consideration to the publication in this country of illustrated literature of a sadistic nature from imported matrices; and whether he will make a statement;

(2) whether he has now given consideration to the desirability of appointing an advisory council on the problem of obscene or sadistic illustrated publications such as might be commonly seen by children; and whether he will make a statement.²⁴

Questions of obscenity invariably raised questions of censorship, with the response typically being to point out “the difficult question of differentiating between what is objectionable and what is not objectionable. There are four or five publications which are quite unobjectionable – one produced by a parson.”²⁵ This last comment is clearly a reference to *Eagle*, created by the Reverend Marcus Morrison and launched on 14th April 1950 with its cover star Dan Dare, Pilot of the Future, suggesting that the problem did not lie with the science fiction genre as such. Nevertheless, the campaign was ultimately successful, resulting in the banning of the importation of American crime and “terror” comics through the Children's and Young Person's Harmful Publications Act of 1955.

As has already been noted, George Orwell's “Riding Down to Bangor” from 1946, two years before he completed the novel which would, in adaptation, be identified with American comics, indicated a shift in modern American children's literature away from novels and towards comics.²⁶ These he perceived as dangerous for English children in their sensational narratives. The concerns for the effects of these comics clearly predate Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent*, the Kefauver Hearings and the Children's and Young Person's Harmful Publications Act of 1955. Interestingly, Orwell singles out images from comics with a science fictional

²⁴ *Hansard*, 11th November 1954, column 1392

²⁵ *Hansard*, 11th November 1954, columns 1393-1394

²⁶ Orwell, George, “Riding Down From Bangor” in *Essays* (London: Penguin, 1994) p.400, originally published in *Tribune*, 22nd November 1946

association to press home his point about the deleterious effects of these publications: sinister scientists, atomic bombs, laboratories, the alien Superman, robots and dinosaurs. However, in 1939, he had written about the new “scientifiction” theme in his essay on “Boy’s Weeklies”, and concluded that:

Naturally, it is the magical, Martian aspect of science that is most exploited, but one or two papers include serious articles on scientific subjects, besides quantities of informative snippets. [...] There is a marked advance in intellectual curiosity and, on the whole, in the demand made on the reader’s attention.²⁷

In other words, this type of story could be good, because it made the reader think.

Part of the fear expressed in both the Parliamentary debates and in Hunt’s letter is the loss of British ways of behaving to those of America, a fear also represented by Orwell in his essay “Decline of the English Murder”, written in 1946. In that essay Orwell represented Americanisation as the product of an unstable society during wartime which led people to look for thrills in the instant expression and enactment of desires, frequently based on media-fed fantasies, as opposed to a British character of repressed emotion. This fear is at the heart of the apparent change of opinion on science fiction for children that Orwell shows between the 1939 “Boy’s Weeklies” and the 1946 “Riding Down From Bangor”. Where once science fiction scenarios could be seen as a spur to the imagination and curiosity, now they simply represented the American desire for the sensational and for instant gratification spreading into British society.

It is this fear that Britain would emulate American culture that Martin Barker has identified as at the core of the British horror comics campaign; as he puts it:

A heritage was at stake: Englishness, good manners, proper English language, fine literature. People who have these things know instinctively that anything else is harmful. In the name of traditional values they defend traditions for reasons that do not need saying - for to say them, to make them a matter of truth or falsity, would destroy their very status as the obvious traditions that make us what we are: English.²⁸

It is also illustrated by the broadcast on the Third Programme of a talk by Irving Sarnoff on “Crime Comics and the American Way of Life”, published in *The*

²⁷ Orwell, George, “Boy’s Weeklies” in *Essays*, p.92, originally published in *Horizon*, March 1940, written in 1939

²⁸ Barker, *A Haunt of Fears*, pp.82-83

Listener of 10th March 1955, which discussed Wertham's book and the positions of various other psychologists on the crime and "horror" comics which Wertham attacked. While he does not directly address the British situation in his talk, Sarnoff positions the debate for a British audience by relating it to the fears already current in British society:

During the past year, horror comics, those unhappy bits of American export, have forced their way into the foreground of British public opinion. They have raised a storm of debate. Charges and countercharges have been exchanged by journalists and parliamentarians. There seems little to add to these multifarious reactions, but it may still be of some use briefly to review the subject and attempt to set it in the cultural scene from which it emanates.²⁹

The fear of Britain becoming more American, of it being infiltrated and infected by American culture, is also clear in the concern expressed in Parliament regarding the fact that these comics were not just being imported from the USA, but that the printing matrices were being imported and that British companies were actually producing copies of the comics expressly for the British market. This was not a case of incidental infection, as had been the situation with the pulp magazines brought across as ballast before the War; this was a conscious invasion.

Hunt's letter clearly positions their own desire, and that of others like them, within the middle-brow. They condemn the producers of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as juvenile by describing them as "readers of horror comics", while at the same time decrying the "highbrow" nature of recent Sunday plays. They neither desire to be challenged intellectually nor to engage with the allegedly simple narratives of a comic book, supposedly intended for children. They want something in-between, the "Not too good, and not too bad, but in the middle" of Kneale's BBC civil servant.

Kneale's depiction of the British society of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as fascist, brutal and above all recognisable as only slightly changed from the present day challenged the status quo, not only of television, but of society. It followed one of the typical purposes of the science fiction genre in questioning the world as it is through the lens of an alternative. It may also be one of the reasons that the play,

²⁹ Sarnoff, Irving, "Crime Comics and the American Way of Life", *The Listener*, 10th March 1955, p.417

together with *The Quatermass Experiment*, has survived in academic writing; as Catherine Johnson has suggested:

academically valued television is that which opens up spaces for resistance to dominant ideological structures through its treatment of themes and characters, while academically dismissed television is that which confirms dominant ideological structures through the representation of stereotyped characters and conventional narratives.³⁰

In other words, without the fuss made over its possible bad influence, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* may not have survived in critical discourse, as is the case with the largely-forgotten 1965 BBC version from the *Theatre 625* strand, which restaged Kneale's script, but received very little attention at the time or subsequently. The shifts in tastes and social concerns from 1954 to 1965, and possibly the respective quality of the productions, meant that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was no longer the shocker that it once was.

The public response to the 1954 adaptation was focussed on content, and more specifically on the moral interpretation of that content. As Roger Brown has commented in relation to the position of television with regard to "the arts":

In the welter of controversy which surrounds the effects and consequences of television, two types of concern are prevalent insofar as the medium is looked on as a channel of artistic communication – as a channel for literature, drama, ballet, music and the other arts, that is. On the one hand, television is seen as a threat to these older arts, mainly because it may stop people from reading novels, going to the theatre, or listening to music. On the other hand, the sorts of plays and the kinds of entertainment which television provides are seen as threats to established forms of morality and behaviour.³¹

In other words, television itself is, or at least was, a revolutionary medium by the simple fact of its newness. When television did produce something new and specifically televisual, the fact that this had to be something other than that which was acknowledged in the canons of "art" which underlie society meant that these new productions were themselves threatening to those canons and to that society.

Brown's comment also reflects the tension that was caused by the growing importance of television in the society of the 1950s. This development grew from the

³⁰ Johnson, Catherine, *Telefantasy* (London: BFi Publishing, 2005) p.148

³¹ Brown, Roger L., "Television and the Arts" in James Halloran (ed.), *The Effects of Television* (London: Panther, 1970) p.106

increased leisure time available to many people. Andrew Crisell has characterised the results of this increased leisure time as:

They had more time for ‘consuming’ the media they had purchased, hence the opportunity to learn in a direct or indirect way more about what was happening in the world, not simply the relatively clear-cut world of political events and current affairs, but also the vaguer, yet no less influential, spheres of social trends – of attitudes and values, life-styles, formations of taste in clothes, music, furniture, private transport and countless other concerns. Television, particularly after the national focus it attained during the 1953 Coronation, was central to the shift, and statistics showing licences more than doubling during the mid-1950s support this.³²

Crissell goes on to join this increased availability of leisure time and information with the 1944 Education Act, with the resulting development of:

a more critical disposition among large numbers of people. This new mood or spirit took various forms which might be broadly expressed as: an increasing scepticism about politics and public affairs; a need to question or challenge traditional values or ‘the received wisdom’; a growing distrust of, even an impatience with, certain notions of authority; and a sharper awareness of social differences and division.³³

It is this scepticism that is displayed in Kneale’s scripts for *The Quatermass Experiment* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and which suggests that they did convey somewhat revolutionary ideas, even if not in the outward disruption of class and gender roles that Joy Leman was looking for when she claimed that “one of the interesting aspects of the *Quatermass* serials is the way in which established stereotypes of class, gender and family are integrated into what was perceived at the time as a new and exciting television genre.”³⁴ It is also this scepticism that spurred complaints from viewers who did not like to see their comfortable image of society disturbed by this questioning, even if it was conveyed through the, apparently, Establishment figure of a respected scientist.

But it is this very questioning which was key to the success of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, at least, even though Crisell puts the start of the national mood of scepticism in 1956, with the success of *Look Back in Anger* at the Royal Court

³² Crissell, Andrew, “Filth, Sedition and Blasphemy: The Rise and Fall of Satire” in Corner (ed.), *Popular Television in Britain*, p.146

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Leman, Joy, “Wise Scientists and Female Androids: Class and Gender in Science Fiction” in Corner (ed.), *Popular Television in Britain*, p.108

Theatre. And if, as Crissell insists, “Since the days of Lord Reith there has been a pervasive assumption that the Corporation’s function was to shape values and attitudes, rather than merely to reflect them”,³⁵ then, in broadcasting these productions which questioned the Establishment, the BBC was suggesting that there was something in society which needed to be challenged. The reactions of several viewers who wrote in to the *Radio Times* or to the BBC suggest that this was the case, whether the production acted as “a virile challenge to my faith”,³⁶ as one of a series of “danger warnings”,³⁷ as an indicator of things that were “well on the way to being true now”,³⁸ or as a reminder of Belsen.³⁹ The horror of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is simply that all attempts at individuality and separation from government control are portrayed as ultimately futile. The irony is that Kneale and Cartier’s “rebellion” against the cosily intimate drama mode was one that was accepted and controlled, authorised and approved by the authorities of the BBC.

Christine Cornea has stated, in relation to the conclusion of the film version of *The Quatermass Xperiment* (Hammer Film Productions, 1955), where Quatermass destroys the alien invader in Westminster Abbey by electrocuting it, that:

Yes, the destruction of the alien entity can convey a fear of a female or feminine power, but, unlike the earlier thrillers, class issues have not vanished in this film. As linked to the coronation, this scene surely displays an attack upon the British class system. While Britain sought to strengthen its relationship with the United States after World War II, the period saw a surge in the number of American companies and corporations setting up European headquarters in Britain, and fears abounded about an encroaching Americanisation of British culture. So, remembering that it was Quatermass who brought this alien force to Earth, and more specifically to Britain, the amorphous mass can equally be read as an all-absorbing and American threat to British tradition.⁴⁰

While Cornea’s argument is based around the film version of the story, with an American Quatermass providing a focus for this anti-American reading, it is still

³⁵ Crissell, “Filth, Seditious and Blasphemous” in Corner (ed.), *Popular Television in Britain*, p.148

³⁶ Cowlett, T.A., “Viewers Views on ... ‘1984’”, *Radio Times*, 31st December 1954, p.12

³⁷ West, Timothy L., “Viewers Views on ... ‘1984’”, *Radio Times*, 31st December 1954, p.12

³⁸ Letter, E.Day to BBC, undated response to first broadcast of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, BBC WAC T5/362/2

³⁹ Stollery, H., telegram to BBC, undated, BBC WAC T5/362/2

⁴⁰ Cornea, Christine, *Science Fiction Cinema: Between Fantasy and Reality* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007) p.62

possible to read the serial's absorbing creature as representing the threat of British culture being absorbed by an alien culture, with American popular culture being the obvious threat to British culture at the time. The threat of absorption is not merely about the loss of cultural identity, but also the loss of personal identity. This could be to American culture, but also to mechanisation or to the socialist urges of post-war government, or to governmental control, which continued to apply wartime necessities and methods to post-war life. This would be most clearly indicated in *Quatermass II*, where the camera script indicates that signs which are displayed around communal areas of the alien-controlled Winnerden Flats "are reminiscent of those used in wartime",⁴¹ an association that was also used in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

These echoes of wartime control are expressive of Kneale's concerns about the actual state of the country, even though the impending arrival of commercial television could in itself be understood as a sign that the country was re-establishing itself financially. As was reported in the *Radio Times* in 1952 with regard to the Government's plans for television following the Beveridge Report, "They provide [...] for the setting up of new Television stations in competition with the BBC, with the approval of Parliament, when the economic resources of the country permit."⁴² In other words, Parliament's approval of competitor television services meant that the economy was considered to be sufficiently healthy to support the new channel after essential expenditure had been accounted for. In 1952, though, a mere two years before the decision to move ahead with commercial television was made, the time when this approval would be possible may well have seemed far off:

Arguments about our standard of living have been going on since the end of the war. We are all somewhat disappointed. Are we ever going to get back on the level again? Are we working hard enough to pay our way? Can we afford the social services we now enjoy? Have our living standards gone up, or have we merely increased one main standard at another's expense?

Every year prices seem to go on rising; every year we pay more for coal, railway fares, clothes, and almost everything. And yet, though fruit and vegetables are so dear, we still hear of plums and apples rotting on the trees because the price offered is less than the cost of picking them.⁴³

⁴¹ Kneale, Nigel, *Quatermass II*, camera script held by BBC Written Archives Centre, episode 2, p.10

⁴² Anon., "The Future of British Broadcasting", *Radio Times*, 23rd May 1952, p.2

⁴³ Anon., "What Must We Do to Pay Our Way", *Radio Times*, 29th February 1952, p.7

This concern over lack and over economic redevelopment emphasises the often-overlooked differences between the United States and Britain at this time. For the US, the 1950s were a time of plenty, of growth, while in Britain, they were a time of continued rationing and of a continuation of wartime practices into peacetime. These wartime practices are an ongoing source of discontent for Kneale, who repeatedly uses reflections of activities essential during wartime but continued into peacetime as signifiers of sinister activities and government control. He was particularly concerned with the fear that people had become so used to obeying official pronouncements and signs that they were losing their individuality and had become merely part of the whole, absorbed into a mass like the alien thing which Victor Carroon and the other astronauts, together with plant and animal life, become in *The Quatermass Experiment*. Similarly, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Kneale and Cartier enhanced Orwell's vision of a regulated society by emphasising the contemporary, militarised aspects, with notes for the filmed sequences calling for a "Berlin-style warning notice"⁴⁴ for the entrance to Prole Sector 1, its echo of the checkpoints in divided Berlin further emphasised by the demand on the sign: "Proceed only on necessary business. Be ready to produce Identity Papers." Kneale even added a very subtle suggestion that the material produced by the BBC was a pabulum for the masses like the material produced by *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* PornoSec, as O'Brien reads out part of a thriller which includes the line "Put down that gun. It might be loaded",⁴⁵ a line which Kneale repeatedly used in interviews as an example of the typical dialogue of unimaginative television thrillers of the time.⁴⁶

Despite its clear discontent with contemporary life and the continuation of wartime practices into peacetime, the establishment's reaction to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was perhaps rather unexpected. While some politicians picked up on the angry response of the middlebrow, a rather different response was reported by D.K. Wolfe-Murray in a memo to the Director of Television Broadcasting:

On the night of December 15th, I had the honour of being presented to H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh, and spent some time in conversation with him.

⁴⁴ Anon., notes for filmed sequences, BBC WAC T5/362/1

⁴⁵ Kneale, Nigel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

⁴⁶ For example, in Andy Murray, *Into the Unknown*, p.30; in Julian Petley, "The Manxman", p.91

During this talk he expressed his admiration for the production and message contained within Cartier's production of Orwell's play, he also stated that the Queen herself was of the same opinion.

I thought perhaps you might be glad to know of this.

He did not in any way charge me to be his messenger, but I have taken upon myself to inform Rudolf [sic.] Cartier and his three leading actors.⁴⁷

Considering the other responses to the production, it is likely that all involved were "glad to know of this", although there was further support from within the royal family, as reported in another memo within the BBC:

You may be amused, as an "envoi" to the ballade of 1984, to know that Princess Margaret later that evening told me her mother had listened [sic] on the Sunday and advised "them all" to watch it on Thursday which they did. In their view it was one of "the best productions I have ever seen on television."⁴⁸

The response to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was strong on both sides, and the question of taste and intelligence arose regularly on both sides. While Hunt was calling those responsible for the production "sadists & readers of horror comics", Trevor Preen wrote to Rudolph Cartier to thank him for the production, and for the decision "to warn neurotics, clots, + infantilists that they had but to turn the switch, + hey presto there was the Light Programme instead."⁴⁹ It is significant that Preen chose the Light Programme as the one to which to direct the "neurotics, clots, + infantilists" who he thought were those who would complain about the production, as that was the radio channel for entertainment, rather than the serious music and culture of the Third Programme, or news, drama and talks of the Home Service. As Roger L. Brown put it:

The old Light programme carries with it some notion of lowbrow entertainment; the old Home Service was for the middlebrow audience; while the Third Programme was avowedly (and sometimes ostentatiously) highbrow.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Memo, D.K. Wolfe-Murray to D.Tel.B., cc. A.D.Tel.B., 16th December 1954, BBC WAC T5/362/2

⁴⁸ Memo, signature illegible, 20th December 1954, BBC WAC T5/362/2

⁴⁹ Letter from Trevor Preen to Rudolph Cartier, 20th December 1954, BBC WAC T5/362/2

⁵⁰ Brown, "Television and the Arts" in Halloran (ed.), *The Effects of Television*, p.124

The Light Programme was also the channel most associated with American popular culture, particularly imported light music, which had entered the programming regime during the war in response to the presence of American troops. The distaste for American-style popular culture that Kneale would express through his “Planet of the Dragons” “3-D film” insert in *The Quatermass Experiment* was also thus present in Preen’s direction to the Light Programme of those emotionally and intellectually unable to cope with the complexities of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. However, this imputation of a certain lack of maturity, particularly emotional maturity, to those on the other side of the debate is also present in Hunt’s letter condemning *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. A liking for American popular culture was clearly seen as reprehensible in relation to British culture.

Did Orwell’s reputation as a socialist come into attitudes about the programme? A letter from E.S.Curtis would suggest that there was certainly an anti-right reading in play, saying “I trust you will not be deterred by Tory M.P.s or the yellow Press”,⁵¹ while a telegram from H.Stollery read “Please repeat 1984 no doubt some have forgotten Belsen”.⁵² One letter related the problems over the play to Orwell’s popularity and ability:

It is because the truth often hurts that “George Orwell” (Eric Blair) was not a “popular” writer.

But he was a genius and very sincere and your production is a worthy memorial to a great thinker.

The masses do not want to “think” very much (they prefer “soporifics”) these days – the “hullabaloo” was only to be expected.⁵³

Again, it is intellectualism and rationality, or lack of those qualities, which is considered to be at stake. What is particularly interesting with this letter is the way that it picks up on the attitude towards the masses expressed in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*’s depiction of the Proles as uneducated, driven by sentimentality and emotion and kept under control by the manipulation of these by the media. This is not the only comparison between those complaining about the production and the world

⁵¹ Letter from E.S.Curtis, 15th December 1954, BBC WAC T5/362/2

⁵² Telegram from H.Stollery, undated, BBC WAC T5/362/2

⁵³ Letter, R.Downs to Rudolph Cartier, 14th December 1954, BBC WAC T5/362/2

depicted within it that was made by individuals responding to the production. J. Ware wrote that “Any move by ‘them’ to stop the repeat on Thursday can only be regarded as the first move towards the establishment of the Thought Police.”⁵⁴

These letters, whether for or against these productions, are public expressions of taste. They assume that others will share the same opinions and position the writer not just as someone who shares those ideas, but as someone who is prepared to stand up for them. In this way the letter writer assumes the position of a community leader, a defender of taste. But the taste that is being defended is solidly middlebrow and middle class, displaying a fear of the populist as well as the intellectual. John Fiske has argued:

that attempts to produce or defend a national culture, whether by a national broadcasting system or other means, have historically been dominated by middle-class tastes and definitions of both nation and culture, and have shown remarkably little understanding of popular pleasures or popular tastes.⁵⁵

This evidently meant that the lower classes were not catered for, and they were the ones most likely to engage with American popular culture such as comic books, as Fiske has explained:

American popular culture in the 1950s and 1960s was eagerly taken up by British working-class youth who found in its flashy streamlining a way to articulate their new class confidence and consciousness. Such symbolizations of their identity were simply not available in “British” culture which appeared to offer two equally unacceptable sets of alternatives – the one a romanticized cloth-cap image of an “authentic” traditional working class culture, the other a restrained, tasteful, BBC-produced inflection of popular culture. The commodities produced by the American cultural industries were mobilized to express an intransigent, young, urban, working-class identity that scandalized both the traditional British working class and the dominant middle classes. The cultural alliance between this fraction of the British working class and their sense of American popular culture was one that served their cultural/ideological needs at that historical moment.⁵⁶

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Smith expresses the hope that the future of society lies with the Proles. The 1954 adaptation clearly showed its audience that the hope of society did not lie with the clerical middle classes like Smith or the managerial

⁵⁴ Letter, J. Ware to Rudolph Cartier, 13th December 1954, BBC WAC T5/362/2

⁵⁵ Fiske, John, *Television Culture* (London: Routledge, 1980) p.324

⁵⁶ Fiske, *Television Culture*, p.321

classes like O'Brien, as the system would simply overwhelm any individuality and ensure that they followed the accepted "way things are done". If there was any hope for a change in society in the production, then it could only come from the Proles, the consumers of mechanically-produced fiction in the American mold, of sentimental songs and cheap alcohol, living in back-to-back terraces and churning out children: the image of the people feared by the middlebrow middle classes. This fear and distaste is expressed by Julia within the production in response to Smith's eulogy on the Prole woman, but Julia is revealed to be as susceptible to the control of society as anyone else, the middle-class rebel who is ultimately a conformist. This was the strength of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the source of its power, that it expressed the very attitudes which would be raised against it and showed them to be part of the power structure supporting the brutal society of Airstrip One. In Orwell's novel, a final chapter shows that this culture passed, implying that it crumbled from within, possibly without the need for a Prole rebellion. Kneale's adaptation does not have this revelation, there is only a boot, stamping on a human face, forever, and the social structures depicted were shown to already exist. 1954 was already 1984.

Chapter Six:

Reasons for Survival: Why Remember Quatermass?

While the Kneale / Cartier collaborations on *The Quatermass Experiment* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* may be the celebrated side of television science fiction in 1953 and 1954, they are not the only examples from the period. *Number Three* has already been discussed in relation to the ways that Kneale used this adaptation to express concerns over the uses of scientific research and the government control of research establishments. These attitudes recurred in Kneale's later scripts, both adaptations and original material such as the Quatermass serials. However, *Time Slip* and *The Lost Planet* were not written by Kneale, and so can be used to investigate how much of the revolutionary spirit seen in *The Quatermass Experiment* was a function of the genre, as Lez Cooke has suggested,¹ and how much this can be attributed to Kneale as the writer.

This counterpoint is more difficult to make due to the lack of information on these productions. The BBC Written Archives Centre has not retained any material on *Time Slip* apart from a single memo. No scripts are available for *The Lost Planet* or its sequel serial, *Return to the Lost Planet* (1955), either in television or radio form. What little production material there is on *The Lost Planet* is held in the production files on the magazine programme that contained the serial, *Sugar and Spice*. Neither *Time Slip* nor *The Lost Planet* was heavily featured in the *Radio Times* nor reviewed in *The Listener*; indeed, while the television drama review pages for *The Listener* of 3rd December 1953 have a still from *Time Slip*, the review itself is entirely concerned with a production of *Crime and Punishment*.

The Quatermass Legend

In order to question the position of the Quatermass serials in British television history, the current understanding of this position must first be examined. An example of the way that the character has embedded itself into the culture can be found as recently as May 2009, where a description of an episode of science fiction

¹ Cooke, Lez, *British Television Drama: A History* (London: BFi, 2003) p.20

adventure series *Primeval* (Impossible Pictures, 2007-2009) suggested that actor Jason Flemyng, “having once played a certain iconic sci-fi professor created by Nigel Kneale, should find tonight’s creature curiously familiar: a flesh-eating fungus monster.”² Flemyng portrayed Quatermass in the 2005 live version of *The Quatermass Experiment* for BBC Four. What is particularly significant about this is that the writer did not see any need to identify the character by name, but believed that the connection to Kneale, the use of the title “professor” and a description of a fungoid creature would suffice to identify Quatermass to the *Guardian* television guide-reading public.

The legend of *The Quatermass Experiment* claims that “It revolutionised TV drama and held this austere, thrill-deprived island spellbound.”³ Charles Barr has seen it as “a landmark both in BBC policy, as a commissioned original TV drama, and in intensity of audience response.”⁴ Joy Leman has pointed to the serial as “The entry of science fiction into British television”,⁵ possibly following Kneale’s statement that “It was the first science-fiction-type piece to be put out on British TV.”⁶ As we have seen, this was not the case, and Kneale was himself involved with earlier television science fiction dramas, but this does show how the Quatermass legend was built up from pronouncements issuing from the programme makers themselves. More specifically, Lez Cooke has stated that “*The Quatermass Experiment* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* [were] the two productions which were to mark television drama’s decisive break with ‘filmed theatre’.”⁷ Cooke positions the importance of these productions as one of formal style, of the way that producer Rudolph Cartier broke free from conceptions of television as a theatrical experience and instead created something distinctively televisual.

² Catterall, Ali, “Pick of the Day – *Primeval*”, *The Guardian, The Guide*, 25 April 2009, p.57

³ Gatiss, Mark, “British Gothic – A Celebration”, *The Guardian*, 19 October 2001, accessed at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2001/oct/19/artsfeatures1> on 1st July 2009

⁴ Barr, Charles, “Broadcasting and Cinema 2: Screens Within Screens” in Charles Barr (ed.), *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1986) p.215

⁵ Leman, Joy, “Wise Scientists and Female Androids” Class and Gender in Science Fiction” in John Corner (ed.), *Popular Television in Britain: Studies in Cultural History* (London: BFi, 1991) p.109

⁶ Kneale, Nigel, “Foreword” to *The Quatermass Experiment* (London : Arrow Books, 1979) p.6

⁷ Cooke, *British Television Drama*, p.17

Catherine Johnson's work on *The Quatermass Experiment* supports this reading of the Quatermass legend.⁸ In addition to stating that *The Quatermass Experiment* was a key programme in creating a new televisual style which broke away from the staid, intimate drawing-room dramas drawing heavily on theatre style that preceded it and ushered in a new, engaging, energetic style of television drama owing more to the cinema, the legend also says that the serial emptied social spaces and bound the nation together through its television sets. Johnson clearly and concisely demonstrates that there is a strong element of truth in many aspects of this legend, including illustrating the importance of the serial to the BBC and the status that it, along with its writer and producer, acquired as a result of the serial's success.

However, there are elements to the legend that obscure previous accomplishments, and these obfuscations are clearly illustrative of the way that television has handled the development of its own style as well as the way that it has considered its own history. Key to this is the expansion of the potential audience for television, which was not really a national service until the mid-1950s. The BBC announced in the *Radio Times* dated 8 August 1952 that:

The opening of the Wenvoe transmitter completes the first stage of the BBC's plan to provide television throughout the United Kingdom. After August 15 it will be possible for about eighty per cent of the population of this country to see television programmes, a national coverage which is not equalled in the United States or anywhere in the world.⁹

For many people, the start of the television service came with the mass acquisition of sets by the public to watch the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953, the same year that *The Quatermass Experiment* was broadcast.

The Quatermass Experiment also continued its existence in other media beyond its immediate success. The status of the serial, and of the character of Bernard Quatermass, with the general public was retained through the two sequel serials of the 1950s, *Quatermass II* (1955) and *Quatermass and the Pit* (1958-1959) as well as appearances in other media. Exclusive Films, distributor for its production company Hammer Films, released adaptations of these serials in 1955, 1957 and

⁸ See Johnson, Catherine, *Telefantasy* (London: BFi Publishing, 2005)

⁹ Barnes, George, "Television Throughout the Country", *Radio Times*, 8th August 1952, p.2

1967 sequentially.¹⁰ While, as Catherine Johnson points out, the serial was fairly negative about science fiction films,¹¹ the translation of the serial into just such a film may well have been a factor in its longevity. Not only did cinema distribution provide an opportunity to revisit the story for those who had watched it on television, but it also allowed those who had missed the original television broadcast or who lived outside the broadcast area to experience it.

Indeed, Michael Barry noted in an internal BBC memo regarding Hammer Films that “we were satisfied with their handling of ‘The Quatermass Experiment’ and that its presentation as a major film has done the B.B.C. Television Service quite a lot of good.”¹² Such publicity operated both ways, and Hammer were keen to exploit the success of the television version by presenting their film as “Based on the BBC Television Sensation by Nigel Kneale”, with the BBC responding that they “do not care” for this, and that they wanted the word “Sensation” replaced with the simple “Play”.¹³ This dislike of Hammer’s sensationalist approach to the project led to a situation where, when a clip from the Hammer film was to be shown on an ATV film show, it was suggested within the BBC that they demand of ATV that:

- (i) They give due acknowledgement to the BBC Television programme of the same name.
- (ii) That they make it quite clear, in the form of words which we would wish to put together for them, that the film bears no relation to the new series of programmes, “Quatermass II”, which we are about to produce on BBC Television.

I explained that our worry was that the film excerpts might easily give a most misleading impression to the viewing public of the new series of programmes and may put them off seeing them.¹⁴

¹⁰The BBFC website records *The Quatermass Experiment* as an Exclusive Films release, while *Quatermass II* and *Quatermass and the Pit* are recorded as Hammer Films releases. <http://www.bbfc.org.uk> accessed 2 January 2008

¹¹ Johnson, *Telefantasy*

¹² Barry, Michael to E.O.Tel, Memo., “The Quatermass Experiment”, 4th October 1955, BBC WAC R126/401/1

¹³ Turnell, G.M. to Anthony Hinds, “The Quatermass Experiment”, 7th December 1954, R126/401/1

¹⁴ Page, Leslie to A.H.P.C., “Use by A.T.V. of Excerpt from Quatermass Experiment Film”, 11th October 1955, BBC WAC R126/401/1

These attitudes towards the Hammer adaptation of *The Quatermass Experiment* show a reticence toward the exploitation of the connection with a film perceived as being of a different character to the television serials, while acknowledging that the association had some benefits in terms of publicity. But the publicity seems of less importance than a simple desire for the proper acknowledgement of source material.

In addition to the cinematic renditions of the stories, Penguin Books published the scripts for the *The Quatermass Experiment* serial in paperback in 1957, and for *Quatermass II* and *Quatermass and the Pit* in 1960. *Quatermass II* was also serialised in *The Daily Express*, but the newspaper lost interest in this adaptation so had Kneale cut it short, which again illustrates that the character and stories were perhaps not as important at the time as may be thought from the legend.¹⁵

While the first two episodes of *The Quatermass Experiment* were recorded by the BBC, they were not made generally available to the public until the release of the DVD set of the three BBC Quatermass serials in 2005, although they were available to scholars and researchers through the BFi, where they represented the earliest examples of direct-off-air recording of British television drama. This assured the serial's academic status - it is far easier to write about something that you can actually see - which again was supported by the availability of recordings of the sequel serials. This is a clear example of the tendency in histories of television about which John Caughie has expressed concerns, describing it as "the very short recall of television in which history tends to begin with recorded programmes."¹⁶ It also brings into question the very importance of the serial as a part of British television history, as Lez Cooke has pointed out, stating that "The claim therefore that *Quatermass* is ground-breaking may be spurious because, without further research, we do not know whether other original, innovative, productions preceded it, only to disappear, without trace, into the ether."¹⁷

Nevertheless, while there were indeed earlier ground-breaking productions, Rudolph Cartier and Nigel Kneale were fore-runners of those who sought to break

¹⁵ Murray, Andy, *Into the Unknown: The Fantastic Life of Nigel Kneale* (London: Headpress, 2006) p.52

¹⁶ Caughie, John, "Before the Golden Age: Early Television Drama" in Corner (ed.), *Popular Television in Britain*, p.22

¹⁷ Cooke, *British Television Drama*, p.22

away from the then prevailing intimate form of television drama in order to accomplish something more with television. Cartier's background in film and Kneale's love of film brought them to the idea of making more filmic use of television, expanding its scope and scale. They were not the first to do this, as the discussion of Robert Barr's version of *The Time Machine* has already shown. However, Jason Jacobs' work on the form of early television drama shows how much the limited, standardised aesthetic had come to predominate, even though the continued advance of television technology meant that the technical demands which had encouraged those intimate dramas were steadily being removed. The intimate drama still held its benefits for the television producer, being easier to mount and shoot than anything more ambitious, and bearing a closer relation to a theatrical production than a drama making use of space- and time-expanding filmed inserts, like *The Time Machine*, and so being a more familiar way of working for many of the actors.

Indeed, while Cartier would expand on the scope of television drama, Jacobs and Johnson have identified the intimacy of early television technology and particularly its domestic reception as key to the success of *The Quatermass Experiment* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, whether because of the effects of the close-up "exploited to increase tension and suspense"¹⁸ or because of "'nearness' to the performance"¹⁹ allowing for greater emotional effect upon the audience due to their closer engagement with the nuances of the actors' performances. What Kneale brought to the table, in Jacobs' view, was "establishing nearness to the contemporary",²⁰ making more obvious the connections between what was portrayed on screen and the lives of the viewers. The initial success of these productions, then, relied more upon intimacy than expanded scale, and it was essential to this success that the intimacy of the script, which brought characters and themes closer to the experience of the viewer, was matched by the ability of the producer to realise this on screen.

¹⁸ Johnson, *Telefantasy*, p.25

¹⁹ Jacobs, Jason, *The Intimate Screen: Early British Television Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p.138

²⁰ Ibid.

The Importance of Cross-Media Existence

The lack of audience response to *Time Slip* and *The Lost Planet* is of interest in relation to *The Quatermass Experiment* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* because it indicates that these productions simply did not engage the audience in the same way. However, that both *Time Slip* and *The Lost Planet* had a certain success is borne out by their histories through a number of media. *Time Slip* was written by Charles Eric Maine, who is described in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* as “determinedly an author of routine middle-of-the-road genre sf”.²¹ He later used the same basic concept for a film, called *Timeslip* (variant title *The Atomic Man*) (Merton Park Studios, 1956) and again for a novel called *The Isotope Man* (1957), which reworked the plot again to form the basis of a series of novels. *The Lost Planet* began its existence as a children’s radio serial for the BBC, which was followed by *Return to the Lost Planet* and *Secret of the Lost Planet*, with the writer of the serials, Angus MacVicar, also novelising them and then continuing the series in novel form.

In fact, the novelisation of the radio serial *The Lost Planet* had already been published by Burke Publishing by the time that the television version was produced. This resulted in an amicable letter from the publisher requesting “that reference should appear in all announcements that it is ‘adapted from the book THE LOST PLANET by Angus MacVicar’.”²² The listings were changed as a result of this request, even though the serial had originated on BBC radio. Soon afterwards, the publisher once again contacted the BBC, this time requesting some assistance with regard to a bookstore promotion “of Space Books and Space Travel, featuring Angus’ THE LOST PLANET” with the publisher “wondering whether you could cooperate with us by the loan of some of the props used in the serialisation of THE LOST PLANET. This would be of immense value to us”.²³ This request suggests that, while recognising that the BBC would not directly promote their product, the publishers were interested in using association with the television production to advertise their books. Considering the BBC’s typical protection of their properties,

²¹ Clute, John and Peter Nicholls, “Maine, Charles Eric” in Peter Nicholls (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (London: Granada, 1981) p.377

²² Letter from Harold K.Starke to Kevin Sheldon, 5th February 1954, BBC WAC T2/160/2

²³ Letter from Harold K.Starke to Kevin Sheldon, 25th February 1954, BBC WAC T2/160/2

they seemed peculiarly happy to be helpful to the publishers, with the Head of Design and Supply (Television) responding to the internal query regarding the promotion:

we could loan them the Space Ship shell, but I think it should be pointed out quite clearly, that this was designed for Television and will not stand close scrutiny. Obviously, if they must go ahead, they would have to make separate arrangements about the outside properties.

I feel it would be a much better idea if they could photograph the set and perhaps enlarge it up to life size for their display and this would, in fact, give a better effect at a fraction of the cost.²⁴

While this memo is written more from the point of practicality than from the business concept of working with the publisher, the fact that the idea was considered within the BBC suggests that the corporation recognised the possibilities of cross-promotion, even though the publisher's book promotion was not to occur until after the serial had completed its television run.

Exploitation of properties originated for the BBC across the media was nothing new at this point. Annette Mills and Ann Hogarth were dubbed the "Walt Disney of Great Britain" by *News Review* for their successful exploitation of their character Muffin the Mule.²⁵ The article reported the extent of existing use of the character:

Already there has been one Muffin book, and there are others to follow; a comic strip will appear in a children's weekly magazine to be brought out by a national daily newspaper.

Soon, too, the puppets will be earning dollars - *via* a series of 26 quarter-hour Muffin films, which are to be put on American television, and have international syndication.²⁶

In addition to this, forthcoming merchandising included "Muffin slippers, Muffin wallpaper, Muffin nightgowns and Muffin toys, plus songs and records."²⁷ This range of products demonstrates how media figures could be marketed across a variety of media and types of merchandise and so extend their audience. However,

²⁴ Memo, Richard Levin to Kevin Sheldon, 4th March 1954, BBC WAC, T2/160/2

²⁵ Anon., "Walt Disney of Great Britain", *News Review*, 6th April 1950

²⁶ Anon., "Walt Disney of Great Britain"

²⁷ Anon., "Walt Disney of Great Britain"

the story of the exploitation of Muffin the Mule also demonstrates that the success in these cases was not that of the BBC, although they may have gained through the association with the character. Instead, the success is that of Mills and Hogarth, the creators and owners of the character.²⁸

Similarly, the exploitation of the characters and narratives of *Time Slip* and *The Lost Planet* in other media clearly belongs to Maine and MacVicar, whereas ownership of *The Quatermass Experiment* rested with the BBC. As Kneale was a staff writer when he developed the serial, he only received a small ex gratia payment for the sale of the rights to the film to Exclusive Films.²⁹ BBC policy over publication rights reverting to the scriptwriter was based on commercial concerns: “If we do not think that there is very much money involved in the deal, then the B.B.C. would almost certainly release the publication rights.”³⁰ However, the prospective commercial success of the resulting publication was not the only element considered in relation to the granting of rights, as the BBC were also concerned with the future career of their staff writers and the prospects of employing new ones. The passing of publication rights to the writer would provide them with some security and further credit beyond their contract, which was not perceived as likely to last longer than three to five years, and would also act as an incentive for new writers to become contract staff writers for the Television Service.³¹

The failure of the BBC to exploit *Time Slip* and *The Lost Planet* may lie partly in this issue of them belonging to their original authors. The rights to engage in adaptations, sequels and remakes lay not with them but with the creators, with the money earned from those productions also going to the creators. A sequel serial such as *Return to the Lost Planet* had its appeal, particularly as it was already a tested commodity through radio and novelisation, and this appeal will be considered further

²⁸ The puppet had been made for the puppet theatre owned and run by Hogarth and her husband, Jan Bussell. Bussell acted as producer for the Muffin the Mule programmes, as he had for the 1938 and 1948 adaptations of *R.U.R.*. See McGown, Alistair, “Muffin the Mule” at *Screenonline*, <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/443725/index.html> accessed 10 December 2008

²⁹ Page, Leslie to H.P.C., “‘The Quatermass Experiment’: Mr.Nigel Kneale”, 2nd June 1954, BBC WAC R126/401/1

³⁰ A.H.P.C. quoted in Leslie Page to A.D.Tel.B., “‘The Quatermass Experiment’: Publication Rights”, 28th August 1953, BBC WAC T23/67

³¹ Leslie Page to A.D.Tel.B., “‘The Quatermass Experiment’: Publication Rights”, 28th August 1953, BBC WAC T23/67

in the next chapter. However, the fact that neither *Time Slip* nor *The Lost Planet* have displayed the longevity of *The Quatermass Experiment*, despite the sequels, novelisations and spin-offs, and film and radio versions, suggests that there was something else to the success of Kneale's creation.

“Nearness to the Contemporary”: Content and Themes as Markers of Success

In terms of content, the “routine, middle-of-the-road” content of *Time Slip* and *The Lost Planet* may have been part of the reason that they had their modest success.³² The *Radio Times* summarised the entire plot of *Time Slip* for its readers in its listing for the play, including the conclusion. While the choice of spoiling the ending of the original television drama seems unusual, it has at least provided a clear description of what the production's plot was:

John Mallory has died, but has been brought to life again by an adrenalin injection. Everything about him is now normal except that his time-sense is out of synchronisation by 4.7 seconds. He understands what is said to him and replies lucidly to questions – 4.7 seconds *before* they have been put to him.

Dr. Slade, a hospital psychiatrist, becomes interested in Mallory's case and determines to cure him. After consultation with an eminent physicist friend of his, George Ingram, he decides on the desperate and, to say the least of it, medically unorthodox step of smothering his patient with a pillow, killing him, and bringing him to life again with a more carefully administered injection of adrenalin.³³

This simple, half hour play, at least as described here, is little more than a novelty plot, with little content beyond its bizarre premise and any moral doubts about killing his patient to save him that Slade may have expressed. This is perhaps why Maine decided to add an espionage or crime spin to the story for its later incarnations in film and print. For example, in the film version, the time-slipped man is “Stephen Rayner, a well-known physicist”³⁴ who is shot as part of a plan to sabotage scientific experiments using a double, with the time slip occurring when Rayner “experiences ‘clinical death’ for seven seconds during an operation, and as a

³² Clute, John and Peter Nicholls, “Maine, Charles Eric” in Nicholls (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, p.377

³³ *Radio Times*, 20 October 1953, p.32

³⁴ *Monthly Film Bulletin*, October 1955, p.170

result of this his brain works seven seconds ahead of time.”³⁵ *Monthly Film Bulletin* describes the film of *Timeslip* as “Quite a creditable addition to the British school of ‘scientific’ thrillers”,³⁶ again indicating that any science fictional element to the production is primarily a gimmick subservient to the thriller aspects of the narrative.

The single memo that survives regarding the television version of *Time Slip* supports the idea that appealing to the middlebrow was recognised within the BBC as the way of assuring viewer happiness. In responding to questions from the Controller of Programmes for Television, producer Ian Atkins writes that “Our audience in the studio will not be ‘highbrow’, I think. They will not despise ‘hokum’.”³⁷ The counterpart to this reassurance that the studio audience will not be “highbrow” seems to be that the production will also feature some “Exciting production methods”, which Atkins believes “tend to be more appropriate to the fantasy-thriller genre than any other.” So, while the programme is certainly not aimed at a highbrow audience, who, it is implied, would not appreciate its fantasy elements, it is also not to be seen as lacking in interest and engagement, which are supplied, at least partially, by “exciting production methods”. As with the early days of television science fiction, fantastic narratives on television were still being used as a suitable site for the development and demonstration of new production techniques.

It could be argued here that the reference to *Time Slip* in relation to the “fantasy-thriller genre” illustrates that this was not yet a genre in its own right. Using Rick Altman’s concept of genrification as the development of descriptors from adjectives to nouns, the “fantasy” element of the “fantasy-thriller” description acts as an adjective rather than as a descriptor in its own right: the programme is a thriller which has fantasy elements.³⁸ However, when compared to the description of *Mystery Story* as a “scientific-romantic mystery” story,³⁹ “fantasy-thriller” can be seen as less of an adjectival description and more as a case of genre fusion. Both fantasy and thriller elements are present in *Time Slip*, as they are in *Mystery Story*,

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Memo Ian Atkins to CPTel, 23 September 1953, BBC WAC T5/529

³⁸ See Altman, Rick, *Film/Genre* (London: BFi Publishing, 1999)

³⁹ Hale, Lionel, “Mystery Story”, *Radio Times*, 15 August 1952, p.38

which could be seen as a forerunner of this type of narrative on British television. However, closer in time to the production of *Time Slip* is *The Quatermass Experiment*, which was announced in each episode's title sequence as "A thriller in six parts". This means that multiple dramas of a similar genre and similar generic labelling were being developed and produced within close proximity to each other, signalling the arrival of a coherent concept of such a genre. Far from a revolution, this was a consolidation.

The narrative of *The Lost Planet* concerned a boy's entanglement with his scientist uncle's private mission to the titular "lost planet" of Hesikos. Once again, television science fiction touches upon a secretive, private rocket-building project and the involvement of espionage and sabotage in such secret projects. Here, though, the rivalry is not between governments directly, but between rival scientists, although as the rival scientist is called Hermanoff and his spy is called Kurt Oppenheim, the opposing projects are easily read as being a replay of both World War II, with the villains' Germanic names, or the Cold War, with Hermanoff understandable as a Russian name. The names bear the simplistic coding of a Cold War thriller, one that will be understood clearly by children; this is, after all, a children's serial.

The rivalry between Hermanoff and Professor Lachlan, the rocket-building uncle of the main character, continues throughout the serial, providing an echo of the drive for technological superiority that came as a result of the War and continued onwards into peacetime. It appears that any message about rivalry and any mirroring of the real-world political situation was intentional, as an article by *The Lost Planet* writer Angus MacVicar regarding the third radio series, *The Secret of the Lost Planet* (1954), clearly opposes the peaceful harmony of Hesikos with the greed and antagonism of contemporary Earth:

Asa, the daughter of Solveig, ruler of Hesikos, is making a visit to Earth and through the medium of Children's Hour she speaks to children everywhere of the peace and goodwill which guide the people of the Lost Planet. But to one man on Earth at least, this doctrine is a dangerous one. It might mean that wars, by which he makes his money, would soon become unknown. Asa is kidnapped so that in return for her safety Otto Schenk can gain possession of the Electronome (the strange Hesikan invention which

transmits ideas through space and time) and thus ensure that the nations will continue to disagree.⁴⁰

Once again, the Germanic name of the villain suggests recent or contemporary events. As with *Stranger From Space*, the serial explores the contemporary world of international rivalries, and in doing so involves itself with ideas to help children improve their understanding of the way that the world works. Engaging with the idea that peace and goodwill could bring an end to conflict might not seem unusual for a broadcaster with a partially-educational remit in a Christian country. Introducing children to the idea that some people want to sponsor conflict for business purposes is more complex and so, depending on its handling, potentially more troubling when applied to the wider world.

However, as with *Stranger From Space*, any social commentary contained in *The Lost Planet* and its sequels was probably diffused for the audience, or simply left largely unnoticed by adult reviewers and commentators, because it was a children's programme. The writers certainly did not see this as an excuse for less effort or lower standards, emphasising in one article both the depth of their technical research and that their focus was on "the 'human' side of such adventures."⁴¹ Such concerns clearly echo Cartier's desire to work from known scientific "datae" on *The Quatermass Experiment*, and Kneale's desire that his science fiction express interest in the characters. The producers of *The Lost Planet* seemed as concerned as the writers over issues of quality and believability, expressing apprehension that "'The Lost Planet' is a project of 'unparalleled complexity', in fact I don't think it can be done at all".⁴² Nevertheless, it was produced for television, along with its sequel, and so was able to broadcast its message of peace and tolerance through its adventure narrative.

So what separates these narratives from those of Nigel Kneale? Without the details and nuances of script and production, it becomes much harder to assess the themes and concepts conveyed by these programmes. Where Kneale expressed fears of scientific research in *Number Three* and *The Quatermass Experiment*, MacVicar

⁴⁰ MacVicar, Angus, "Adventures on the Lost Planet", *Radio Times*, 19 November 1954, p.29

⁴¹ Garscadden, Kathleen, "By Space-Ship to a Lost Planet", *Radio Times*, 16 October 1953, p.39

⁴² Memo, Kevin Sheldon to John Cooper, undated, BBC WAC T2/160/1

presents space travel as a great adventure in *The Lost Planet*. Kneale's concerns with governmental control and interference, expressed in *Number Three*, the Quatermass serials and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, do not seem to impinge upon *Time Slip* or *The Lost Planet*. Where MacVicar presents an apparently independently-funded rocket project, he is operating in a tradition of the eccentric British inventor, but also of the independent or commercial space ship construction seen in science fiction pulps, novels and films, from John Wyndham's *Stowaway to Mars* (1936, writing as John Beynon but reissued as a Wyndham novel in 1972) to *Destination Moon* (1950). Such a non-governmental construction also makes it easier to involve children in the adventure as identification figures for the planned audience. However, this does not mean that aspects of government control do not feature in the narratives, and, as we have seen, there were certainly pacifistic concerns and involvement with issues of international relations and commercial concerns in at least some of his *Lost Planet* stories. Working from such broad information, the particular quality of *The Quatermass Experiment* that has ensured its survival where these other productions have not survived seems nearly impossible to identify.

Conclusions

Television is a form of socialisation reflecting and re-broadcasting predominant social mores. However, television is also inclusive, trying to serve a broad audience, or rather a multiplicity of audiences. It would be a mistake, even in the 1950s, for any one group to assume that television, as a whole, was *for* them. Programmes had been separated for specific audiences practically from the start of television broadcasting in Britain, with the 1940s including sections of programming cordoned off under titles like *For the Housewife* or *Children's Television*, or specific programmes aimed at individual audiences, like *Asian Club*. Yet the assumption made by individuals such as those who complained about the production of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* seems to be that the drama strand is for a particular audience. This is possibly because it is identified by the audience as a regular programme, The Sunday Play, rather than as a sequence of individual plays which happen to be scheduled at roughly the same time each week on a Sunday. The response to these productions shows how some parts of the audience perceived the drama slot as something which

should be consistent in what it presented, harking back to the conservatism which brought stylistic experimentation to an end in the late 1940s.

It also returns to the question of “what television is for”, or, more particularly for this current study, “what television science fiction is for.” Joy Leman considers one of the particular strengths of science fiction to be “the possibility of moving beyond the dominant narrative constraints of realism and naturalism in exploring political ideas, visions of an alternative reality and domains of fantasy.”⁴³ Her particular focus on representations of class and gender meant that she was disappointed in her analysis of *The Quatermass Experiment*. However, that does not mean that that serial, or the other programmes discussed in this chapter or even elsewhere in this study, completely failed to utilise that particular strength of the genre.

Regardless of its formal developments, *The Quatermass Experiment* does engage with political ideas, utilising its particular “domain of fantasy” to represent the loss of individuality and identity which was more bluntly depicted in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. It was this blunt, direct depiction of brutal dehumanisation by the state which was identified by a writer for *The Times* as a possible cause for the furore over the production:

Perhaps the trouble with *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was partly that an inevitably foreshortened adaptation, performed without any proper introduction, left the context of the story too faintly defined, so that it engulfed the present instead of lying in a nightmare future. The firm ground of common assumption was cut from under viewer’s feet, and it is not surprising that some of them felt a sense of betrayal as though a hostile stranger had inadvertently been let in.⁴⁴

Such a “letting in” of a “hostile stranger” seems actually to have been rather the point of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: to utilise the medium to produce a play which made people think about the themes of Orwell’s work and how they reflected on contemporary life. After all, Orwell’s novel had been written reflecting the life which he saw around him, leading to the titling of the novel with a simple reversal of the last two digits of the year in which it was completed: 1948. Indeed, in his article

⁴³ Leman, Joy, “Wise Scientists and Female Androids: Class and Gender in Science Fiction” in Corner (ed.), *Popular Television in Britain*, p.108

⁴⁴ Anon., “Television as a Part of Everyday Life”, *The Times*, 6 September 1955, p.12

accompanying the *Radio Times* listing for the first showing of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Nigel Kneale emphasised that Orwell had depicted “our own age gone mad, gone bad.”⁴⁵ While more blunt about it, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was, like *The Quatermass Experiment*, exploiting the science fictional “possibility of moving beyond the dominant narrative constraints of realism and naturalism in exploring political ideas”.⁴⁶

This does not appear to have been the case with *Time Slip*, although the lack of information about the play makes it difficult to be certain about this. Leman’s description of the particular potential of science fiction including “visions of ... domains of fantasy” may be called into use here, as it appears that *Time Slip* was primarily based around its fantastic gimmick rather than any character development or political motivation. However, the scant material on *The Lost Planet* strongly suggests that that serial did have a political engagement, although in a very broad sense. Descriptions of the characters suggest that it would also have failed in the regard of Leman’s interrogation of *The Quatermass Experiment*’s representations of class and gender, being populated with characters such as “Doctor Lachlan McKinnon, as Scottish as his name,” and, “his cook [...] Madge Smith, a Cockney, determined to take her new hat along and look smart when she arrives [on Hesikos].”⁴⁷ However, as with *The Quatermass Experiment*, to criticise *The Lost Planet* for its representations of class and gender is to criticise it for a missed opportunity rather than for not succeeding in its handling of its actual political concerns.

What this shows is that Kneale’s work on *The Quatermass Experiment* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was not as revolutionary in content as it has been declared in the past. However, this is not because it failed to engage with political and social issues, but rather because to do so was a standard part of science fiction television writing, from *R.U.R.* in 1938 onwards. Even the form was not particularly new; although *The Quatermass Experiment* was the first original science fiction serial

⁴⁵ Kneale, Nigel, “The Last Rebel of Airstrip One”, *Radio Times*, 10 December 1954, p.15

⁴⁶ Leman, Joy, “Wise Scientists and Female Androids: Class and Gender in Science Fiction” in Corner (ed.), *Popular Television in Britain*, p.108

⁴⁷ Sheldon, Kevin, “The Lost Planet” listing, *Radio Times*, 8 January 1954, p.50

intended for adults on BBC television, it had been preceded by children's original science fiction serial *Stranger From Space*, and the one remaining production document for *Time Slip* clearly recognises "the fantasy-thriller genre" as an existing type. Where *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Quatermass Experiment* do appear to be revolutionary is in their production at the hands of Rudolph Cartier, whose association with the material continued throughout the rest of his career, to the extent that the BBC's tribute to mark his death in 1994 was a repeat of his production of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Nevertheless, Kneale's scripts would continue to convey his social concerns, as will be discussed in the next section in relation to his dramas, also produced by Cartier, *The Creature* and *Quatermass II*.

Section Four: “More Than Mere Repetition”: “Sequelisation” and the Question of Identity

Chapter Seven:

“Sequelisation” and the Construction of Identity

Introduction

Asa Briggs notes that “The first formal recognition inside the BBC that there might be a real independent ‘competitor’ - if not a ‘rival BBC’ - can be traced back to July 1952, just before the Corporation’s new Charter came into operation.”¹ From the announcement of the findings of the Beveridge Committee onwards, it was clear that things would have to change within the BBC Television Service whether a competing television channel were approved or not. Once it became clear that a competing service was going to begin, the urgency of these changes increased. The imminent arrival of competition also brought new demands on the Television Service.

Television had always had competition. Rob Turnock has argued that: there *was* already competition in British broadcasting in the 1950s. This was between the three BBC radio services (the Light Programme, the Home Service and the Third Programme), the commercial Radio Luxembourg being transmitted from abroad, and BBC television itself.²

While a persuasive point and a useful reminder, this does not go far enough in illustrating the full extent to which BBC television had to attract audiences away from other activities. As a leisure choice, television also had to compete with everything from cinema, theatre, concerts, through reading, playing music, needlework, to amateur sport, dancing and pigeon-fancying. In short, television was not just competing with other broadcasters, but with the full range of leisure activities. While this competition may in some ways have been mitigated by the BBC’s stated desire that people be selective about their viewing and not watch the

¹ Briggs, Asa, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Volume IV: Sound and Vision* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) pp.937-8

² Turnock, Rob, *Television and Consumer Culture: Britain and the Transformation of Modernity* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2007) p.24

entirety of the television schedule, it is still clear that in order to have some viewership, and thereby justify the share of the licence fee, the television service had to present programming that people would actually want to watch. The introduction of competition within the same medium simply heightened this need, because now audiences and critics, together with the politicians responsible for the decisions about whether or not the licence fee should continue to fund the BBC television service, had a direct point of comparison to make.

It is this point that arguably leads to the development of the BBC as a brand, with television and radio sub-brands which were also, in the case of radio, subdivided further by channel. However, as with the way that the BBC television service was already dealing with competition and promoting itself against other pastimes, this sub-branding was also not new to the Corporation. The establishment of separate radio services during the War, and their subsequent consolidation as the Light Programme, Home Service and Third Programme shows that the BBC was already used to handling a single identity with multiple sub-identities, particularly as the stated intention was that listeners moved between the three channels as their moods and interests and developing tastes took them, in effect creating their own BBC radio schedule.³

As far as science fiction programming is concerned, the cross-fertilisation of the BBC sub-brands began with *The Lost Planet*. As noted previously, this children's television serial had started out as a radio serial, and had then been published as a book, before being adapted for television. The *Radio Times* listing for the first episode of the television serial does not directly mention the radio serial, but it does state that the programme was "Adapted for television by the author",⁴ indicating the narrative's provenance from another source. The listing also places an emphasis on vision, suggesting that even those who had listened to the radio serial or read the novel and so were familiar with the story would still find something new in this version, as:

³ Crisell, Andrew, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London: Routledge, 1997) p.64

⁴ Sheldon, Kevin, Programme Listing for *The Lost Planet* Episode 1 "Mystery at Inverard", *Radio Times*, 8 January 1954, p.50

During this serial you will *see* what happens when a Space Ship runs across the path of a shower of meteorites - the 'vermin of the skies' - and *watch* Dr. McKinnon and Jeremy fighting to save the ship from destruction when the atomic motor becomes unsafe.⁵

A similar, though private, emphasis on the potential visual delights of the television version of the story also appeared in a letter from writer Angus MacVicar to Kevin Sheldon discussing the possibility of producing this adaptation, where MacVicar noted, "we have beautiful Hesikian girls in shorts!"⁶

One of the methods that the BBC used in facing its impending competition was to emphasise not just its reach and its service to the audience, but its identity as a British national broadcaster. In the issue of the *Radio Times* dated 16th September 1955, just a week before the start of ITV broadcasts, BBC Director of Television Broadcasting Sir George Barnes provided an article entitled "BBC Television: A National Service". Opening with the declaration that "The BBC has always considered it a duty to make its Television Service completely national both in range and in character",⁷ Barnes emphasises the presence of the BBC across the regions, and the importance of those regions in supplying programming and skills. The BBC Television Service is not only established as extending across the whole of Britain, but the emphasis is removed from London and placed onto the regions. This serves partly as a counter to accusations of the "Londonisation" of the television service which arose with the Beveridge Committee, but is also a direct comparison with the new independent television service, which Barnes refers to as "an alternative service for a few hundred thousand people in London".⁸ Indeed, the arrival of the competition is dismissed with the statement that it "does not affect either the duty or the practice of the service which supplies those who are out of range of competitive television and, indeed, those who do not want it."⁹ This not only emphasises the limited range of ITV's initial service, but also the possibility that the viewer may

⁵ Sheldon, Kevin, Programme Listing for *The Lost Planet* Episode 1 "Mystery at Inverard", *Radio Times*, 8 January 1954, p.50 (My emphasis)

⁶ Letter, Angus MacVicar to Kevin Sheldon, 20th May 1954, BBC WAC T2/160/3

⁷ Barnes, George, "BBC Television: A National Service", *Radio Times*, 16 September 1955, p.1

⁸ Barnes, "BBC Television: A National Service", p.1

⁹ Barnes, "BBC Television: A National Service", p.1

well choose to do without, that the BBC service can already supply them with their televisual needs.

No matter how dismissive it is, Barnes' article is a direct response to the arrival of ITV, with no other purpose. It does not recognise any particular technical achievement, in the way that other articles appeared with the launch of a new transmitter or the establishment of ties to European television, for example. This article stresses the achievements of the BBC Television Service in terms of technical developments, and sets out the Service's idea of television as something that "should be predominantly 'live'. It must project what is happening here and now. That is where it can be different from the cinema."¹⁰

The article also acknowledges some of the problems and changes facing the BBC Television Service as a result of the development of television. It mentions that "In the last six months 350 trained men and women have left us to serve the competitor",¹¹ but counters with a description of the BBC's training schemes which produce trained individuals of value to any television service. Barnes also acknowledges the loss of potential programming, painting the independent channel as possessive, out to diminish the range of material available to the BBC viewer, while also seeking to reassure that viewer that the Corporation will continue to do their best for their audience in these difficult circumstances:

Although with powerful competitors bent upon exclusive contracts, we shall not have the same choice of events and performers that we have hitherto enjoyed, the BBC will continue to give the most varied and diverse television programmes to suit all the tastes of a nationwide audience.¹²

The article ends by noting that "This service is paid for by those viewers; it owes no allegiance to anyone else",¹³ playing on fears that the commercial channel's programmes would be overly influenced by the demands of the advertisers.

The BBC Television Service also expanded its hours of programming as of 22nd September 1955, the launch date of ITV, following the decision by the Postmaster General to increase the maximum number of broadcast hours for

¹⁰ Barnes, "BBC Television: A National Service", p.1

¹¹ Barnes, "BBC Television: A National Service", p.1

¹² Barnes, "BBC Television: A National Service", p.1

¹³ Barnes, "BBC Television: A National Service", p.1

television.¹⁴ Cecil McGivern, BBC Controller of Television Programmes, announced that the BBC Television Service would broadcast 49 hours a week, “leaving one of the permitted 50 hours in hand for last-minute alterations and additions”.¹⁵ This shows the BBC taking the opportunity to meet their competitor, or even best them, by maximising their broadcasting hours, yet retaining a degree of flexibility by retaining the additional hour of broadcast time for use as required. McGivern’s article also promises a mixture of familiar programmes and new developments across the schedule, although minimal mention is made of these changes being in any way a response to the launch of ITV. The majority of the new programmes mentioned are indicated as being similar to existing programming, with the overall impression being that BBC television was developing, rather than undergoing any sort of dramatic change.

This chapter will examine the ways that the BBC Television Service exploited its existing properties and writers to help in the process of developing an identity for itself which would aid in differentiating it from its new competitor. With this direct competition, the BBC Television Service could no longer take a position that individuals should only watch specific programmes rather than whatever was on television. Recognising that viewer loyalty would, in part, depend on catching the viewer’s attention and retaining it through an afternoon’s or evening’s viewing, the idea of structuring a schedule so that viewers would choose specific programmes to watch and spend the rest of their time on whatever other pursuits they would normally engage in had to be dropped.

The importance of developing sequels and ongoing series rather than simply repeating or re-producing previous successes is also suggested by Jason Jacobs, when he notes that the autumn 1955 BBC television schedule:

changed significantly as a direct result of the new ITV companies beginning transmission in September. For the first time since McGivern’s reorganization in the late 1940s, Sunday night plays were not repeated on Thursday: instead, each of these evenings was devoted to a new drama production, and these were rarely repeated. In an era of competition, the BBC

¹⁴ Barnes, “BBC Television: A National Service”, p.1

¹⁵ McGivern, Cecil, “New Pattern in BBC Television Programmes”, *Radio Times*, 16 September 1955, p.15

drama department was wary of the accusation of repetition and homogeneity, particularly since it was clear that ITV drama departments had no intention of scheduling repeat showings of their dramas in the same week, if at all.¹⁶

A repeat of a play could represent a night lost to the competition, if the majority of the audience had seen it on its first transmission. New drama had to be included, because it had the element of originality that could draw people to a first showing. However, the development of existing properties with new narratives would include the aspect of familiarity that could draw an audience back to see something that was the same, but different, to what they had seen before.

It has been suggested that one of the changes brought about by the arrival of competition was an increased emphasis on serials and series as formats that encouraged viewer loyalty, as well as reducing costs.¹⁷ Jacobs, for example, argues that “A new sense of intimacy as a familiar pattern – external, in the order and timing of programmes, internal in the weekly repetition of situations and characters – was strengthened.”¹⁸ With regard to science fiction, the production of *Return to the Lost Planet* and *Quatermass II* appears to support this idea. That these two sequels were selected for development, rather than possible sequels to any of the single plays which had been produced, could be taken as showing that the serial format was recognised as important. However, it should be remembered that these were not the first sequels in television science fiction, and that the *Stranger From Space* sequel was also in a serial format and was produced before competition became a reality.

Other factors are more likely at play here. The first *Stranger From Space* serial essentially set up its sequel in its concluding episodes. *Return to the Lost Planet* was a pre-existing narrative with proven success on radio and in print, as well as being the sequel to a successful radio and television serial and novel. *Quatermass II* was similarly a follow-up to a proven success. Apart from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, none of the single science fiction plays produced to this point had had anything like the public impact of *The Quatermass Experiment*, so were unlikely to draw the

¹⁶ Jacobs, Jason, *The Intimate Screen: Early British Television Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p.115

¹⁷ See, for example, Turnock, *Television and Consumer Culture*; Sydney-Smith, Susan, *Beyond Dixon of Dock Green: Early British Police Series* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2002)

¹⁸ Jacobs, *The Intimate Screen*, p.116.

attention of producers looking for a sequel. In any case, most of the single plays were adaptations that shared the problem with *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in that they each had a dénouement that precluded a sequel, even if permission could be obtained to produce one.

Return to the Lost Planet (1955), the Child Viewer and Escapism

As a children's programme, *Return to the Lost Planet* also helps illustrate the growth of interest in science fiction amongst children. The *Lost Planet* radio serials and books, and first television serial, had followed on from the two *Stranger From Space* serials, but they all followed the comic strip appearances of *Dan Dare: Pilot of the Future* in the *Eagle*.¹⁹ First appearing in 1950 on the cover of issue one of *Eagle*, Dare was not the only native British space explorer in the comic books, with others including *The Outlaw of Space*, which took a similar cover position to Dare for the launch of *The Lion* in 1952 in an issue also including *The Jungle Robot* (see Figure 1 below).

¹⁹ The first issue of *Eagle* also included a cross-media adaptation in the form of a strip version of the radio series *The Adventures of PC49*. PC49 was also presented in two cinema adventures in 1949 and 1951, produced by Hammer. Dare himself would make the move to radio in 1951, with the Radio Luxembourg series *The Adventures of Dan Dare, Pilot of the Future*, which ran until 1956. Despite various attempts to produce a Dare television series, this was not accomplished until the animated *Dan Dare, Pilot of the Future* in 2001. Anon., "Eagle", *Comics UK* website, <http://www.comicsuk.co.uk/ComicInformationPages/Eagle1Pages/Eagle1HomePage2.asp>

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Figure 7: Advertisement for first issue of Lion, 1952

Fantastic narratives were perceived as having a general appeal to children, but science fiction as a genre was seen as of growing interest to the young. However, it was understood as a fashion amongst the young, something that they themselves shared. Dorothy Berry's comments on science fiction as the story genre preferred by her son over the stories of *Listen With Mother* have already been noted.²⁰ Science fiction was perceived as having a more modern appeal, and one that was spread by the children themselves; it was the children's own fiction, as opposed to that selected for them by their parents. Berry's comments also paint "space fiction" as being more concerned with logic and technology than the emotional narratives of anthropomorphised animals and small children in amusing scrapes presented by *Listen With Mother*. It is the modern fiction of the technological age, not the whimsy of the Edwardian nursery.

²⁰ Berry, Dorothy, "When Hugh Went to School", *Radio Times*, 25 March 1955, p.27

The appeal of fantastical television in particular to children was considered in a small article by Pamela Ide in the *Radio Times* in 1954, which also dealt with the issue of the difference between what the children themselves would select and what their parents would select for them. Considering her own seven year-old daughter's television preferences, she concludes:

children of that age (if Jane should be typical) prefer their real-life characters in real-life presentation, and not in any kind of fictional situation involving the emotions. But when it comes to drama, they like imaginary characters, like puppets (cowboys too come into this category apparently); then they don't care how heart-rending or dangerous the situation.²¹

As cowboys, coming from outside the typical British child's actual life experience, were considered to be "imaginary characters", then science-fictional characters could also be considered to fit into this category, suggesting a reason why they may have been considered appropriate in terms of generating interest in a child audience. Ide considers her daughter's response to the emotional trials of characters in a production of *Heidi*, and other classic literary adaptations that she considered to be appropriate for her child, and finds that her daughter does not enjoy them. At any sign of emotional strife, she rejects these programmes, but she enjoys the slapstick violence and boundary-crossing of Sooty and Western adventures, which her mother would not have selected as appropriate programming.

A similar concern with what interests children as opposed to what might be considered appropriate for them is reflected in an article by producer Michael Westmore about the *Whirligig* magazine programme. He notes that:

Whirligig has always had a serial story. At first this was written by young viewers themselves but latterly the plot has been entrusted to grown-up scriptwriters with less bloodthirsty tastes.²²

Once again, the list of protagonists and scenarios for these serials is much less that of the classic literary adaptation that Ide originally considered appropriate for her daughter to watch, and more that of genre fiction, of detectives and spies, Martian boys and circus clowns. Each provides escapism, or rather a view of the world different from the child's own experience, with the distance from that experience

²¹ Ide, Pamela, "Children and Television", *Radio Times*, 12 November 1954, p.25

²² Westmore, Michael, "Keeping Whirligig Turning", *Radio Times*, 3 October 1952, p.49

providing an emotional buffer so that the child can learn about relationships, ideas and the world without their own developing identity being challenged or engaged with too directly. Ide's daughter enjoyed engaging with characters that were like her when they had pleasant experiences, because she could imagine herself in their place, but she did not want to deal with the threat to her own comfort and her own developing self presented by experiencing their emotional pain. Instead, painful experiences would be mediated through characters more distant from the child's self, allowing them to see and interpret the emotions and experiences, and thereby learn about them, but without the empathy and therefore emotional exposure which comes from placing themselves directly in a character's place.

This comforting aspect for children considering characters who had some distance from their own experience was not represented in a straightforward way in the *Lost Planet* serials, as the main character was a child, but one having unusual adventures and surrounded by adults. Philip Hope-Wallace, reviewing the first episode for *The Listener*, commented that:

‘Robinson and Co.’ must delight the nursery. The children’s space travel serial ‘Return to the Lost Planet’ was pleasantly childish, as all science fiction should be, and without last week’s adult play’s hysteria. Still, I bet it caused some agitation. The landing was quite thrilling.²³

By relating the adventure serial to Defoe's stories of Robinson Crusoe, something of a literary classic, albeit one gradually relegated to the children's library, Hope-Wallace validates his interest in the adventure. His view that science fiction should be “pleasantly childish” is not expanded upon, but could well be related to the “agitation” and “thrilling” nature of the events related in the programme. It is instructive to consider this attitude towards science fiction and the child with the attitude that surrounded genre productions and comic books, as discussed in relation to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where the concern was that a presentation apparently appropriate for children would conceal ideas considered inappropriate and degenerate.

Hope-Wallace reviewed a further episode, with similar brevity, in the 10th February issue of *The Listener*, again displaying his engagement with the narrative.

²³ Hope-Wallace, Philip, “Critic on the Hearth: Same Old Menoo”, *The Listener*, 27 January 1955, p.169

He once again considers that the programme “no doubt has the nursery in an uproar”, before going on to write:

I was sorry, however, to find that now that Jeremy, Janet, Madge, and Co. are well and truly launched on a voyage of discovery on the planet Hesikos they are beginning to have trouble with mysterious Voices. Just like their elders and betters on Sunday nights!²⁴

This refers to *The Voices*, which Hope-Wallace had reviewed for *The Listener* on 20th January, where he referred to it as “not adult drama at all – rather, children playing at frightening themselves.”²⁵ Again, children are considered, in a rather patronising way, to be more concerned with emotion and the manipulation of emotion, in this case fear, unlike their “elders and betters”, presenting a counter-view to that suggested by Dorothy Berry’s article where the logic and lack of emotion of “space fiction” is what appears to appeal to her son. Taken together, these reviews suggest that Hope-Wallace considered that science fiction’s “childishness” stemmed from its manipulation of the emotions, and that “good” science fiction was that which was appropriately framed as for children, rather than for adults. He does not appear to find anything wrong with adults enjoying good science fiction, although he also writes, “That Science Fiction, so called, should bore thousands of us to screaming point surely does not matter.”²⁶ This makes it clear that he finds the genre as a genre to be dull and not to his taste, possibly because he does not consider it adult enough, although he is accepting that others may like it.

The importance of television to *Return to the Lost Planet* is illustrated by MacVicar’s dedication of the novel of *Return to the Lost Planet* to Kevin Sheldon, who was the producer for the television version of *The Lost Planet*.²⁷ The importance of the serial to television is suggested by the listing for the first episode being accompanied by a drawing and brief description in the *Radio Times* (see Figure 3 below). By presenting an image, the emphasis is placed on the visual, but the use of a piece of artwork rather than a photograph, while not unusual for the

²⁴ Hope-Wallace, Philip, “Critic on the Hearth: This Was It”, *The Listener*, 10 February 1955, p.261

²⁵ Hope-Wallace, Philip, “Critic on the Hearth: The Voice of Hysteria”, *The Listener*, 20 January 1955, p.125

²⁶ Hope-Wallace, “The Voice of Hysteria”, p.124

²⁷ As referred to in a letter from MacVicar to Sheldon on 20th May 1954, held at the BBC WAC, T2/160/3

Radio Times of this period, presents a “teaser” image with the impression of an alien landscape which was unlikely to be reproduced as a stage set for the serial. However, this returns us to the question of whether television was attempting to be representational or impressionistic at this stage in its development, and suggests that there was an element of an impressionistic approach for this drama, drawing on the imaginations of its audience, spurred both by the illustration in the *Radio Times* and by their memories of the radio serial or novelisation and the images that they created in their own minds. This in turn suggests a further sense of connection between the different media versions of the story, and that they were considered as complementary rather than as separate versions. If, as Anna Home has claimed, “Watching television encourages children towards books”,²⁸ then emphasising these connections can also be seen as serving the BBC’s remit to educate by encouraging literacy, as well as serving the BBC’s own cross-promotional purposes.

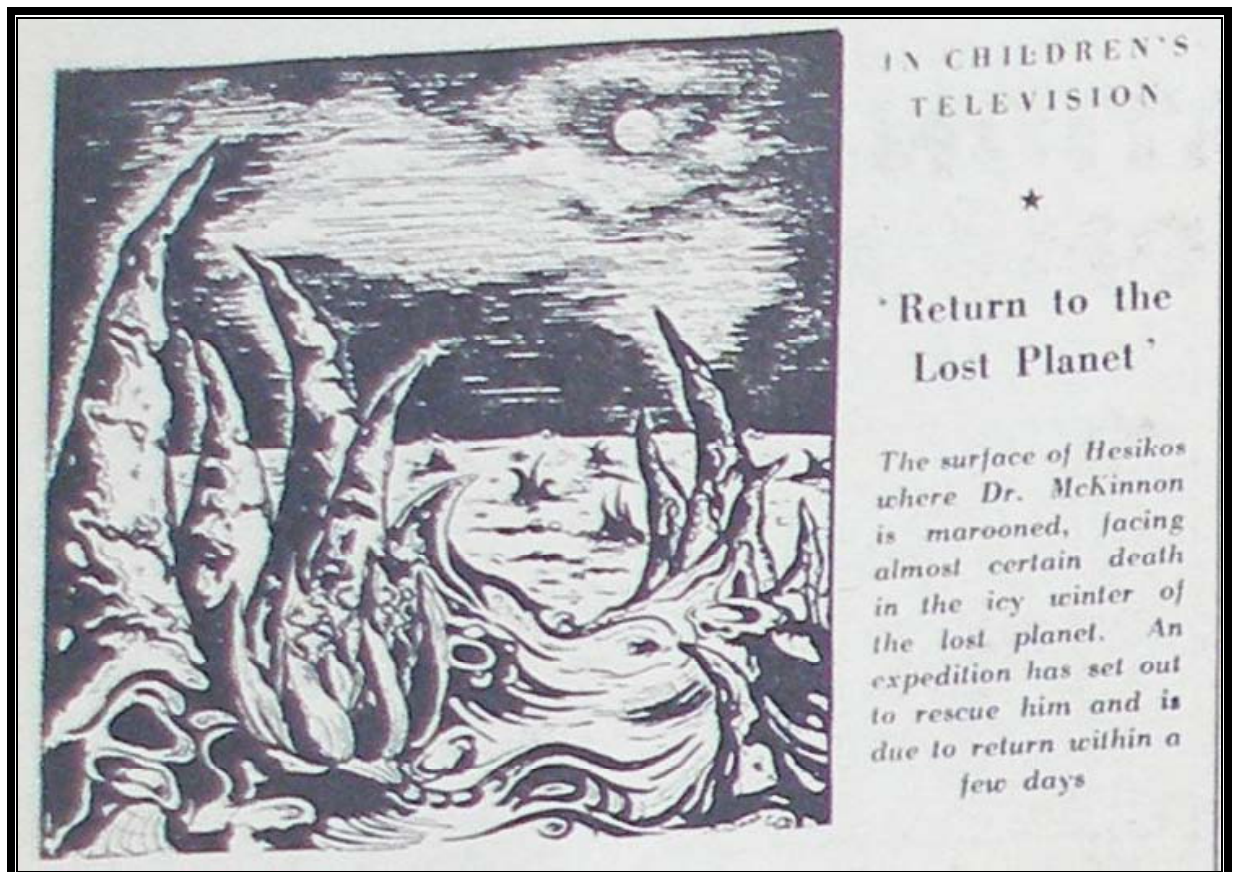


Figure 8: Return to the Lost Planet, *Radio Times*, 31 December 1954, p.46

²⁸ Home, Anna, *Into the Box of Delights* (London: BBC Books, 1993) p.85

There is an additional aspect to the production of programming for children. If “the presence of children in a household made the acquisition of a television set more likely”,²⁹ then it was important for the BBC to have product which appealed to children. This was partly because children were the next generation of viewers, and so having them grow accustomed to preferring the BBC service was important for future viewing figures and the maintenance of the television licence as a means of funding the BBC. There was also the point that having the set tuned to the BBC for the children’s programmes may have made the adults less likely to change the channel for their own viewing. This appeal to children was enhanced for the BBC by the long-standing radio programming for children, meaning that they were likely to have some affiliation with the corporation’s productions already. This affiliation was directly carried over to the television service by programmes such as *Return to the Lost Planet*, which were adapted from those radio productions. The appeal was not just that of familiarity with a channel, but with particular programmes and characters, with the added interest of being able to *see* them and their adventures.

The Creature, Quatermass II and the Significance of the Writer

In researching the relationship of celebrity to early British television, Su Holmes has claimed that “At the level of public discourse, the BBC certainly becomes more vocal about foregrounding its talent once commercial television is on the horizon.”³⁰ Such talent included not only performers from in front of the camera, but also the producers and writers, and even production designers. Such an emphasis can be seen as focussing attention on the way that the BBC Television Service is responsible, through its personnel, for constructing productions that may have different casts but are still enjoyed. It emphasises connections between BBC productions that may not be immediately visible on screen in the form of actors, thereby ameliorating the potential damage of people associating productions that they had enjoyed with performers who may move over to the wealthier ITV. This discourse did not originate with the threat of competition, as can be seen from a number of examples of interviews with and articles by writers and producers which

²⁹ Turnock, *Television and Consumer Culture*, p.116

³⁰ Holmes, Su, *Entertaining Television: The BBC and Popular Television Culture in the 1950s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008) p.157

have already been referred to within this thesis. Maintaining this type of discourse can, then, be seen as a way of maintaining a “business as usual” air and a consistent image for the BBC in what could be understood as uncertain times.

When Cecil McGivern described the developments in BBC television following the extension of broadcasting hours, the first drama that he specifically mentioned in his article was “a sequel to the extremely successful *Quatermass Experiment* by Nigel Kneale”.³¹ This not only shows the BBC’s acknowledgement of *The Quatermass Experiment*’s achievement, but also its recognition of Kneale as a name which the television audience might recognise, alongside others mentioned in McGivern’s article, such as the successful playwright and novelist Francis Durbridge and novelist Frank Tilsley.

However, while the BBC may have utilised the names of established writers in publicity to provide a continuity in their drama, building an idea of the corporation’s output, the corporation’s treatment of those same writers was not supportive of the development of a “family” which would develop a recognisable BBC identity in drama. For example, radio writer Giles Cooper moved to the television Script Unit, joining Nigel Kneale and Philip Mackie, and asked if he could retain the copyright of his radio plays, but was refused: the rights to dramas created by staff writers for the BBC remained with the corporation and not with the writers.³² Kneale commented:

“Giles couldn’t believe it. He’d been not just anybody writing plays but a man who wrote the best plays, and he wrote novels. He was an outstandingly good writer. And he was being treated with the sort of contempt that they tried to treat everybody with. [...] That was what the BBC could do to you. Not just any writer but Giles, who was the king. By way of pacifying him, they wangled him a CBE. Poor Giles left them shortly after and went to ITV.”³³

At about this time, early 1955, Kneale was offered his first long-term contract with the Script Unit. However, the contract did not allow the writer to retain

³¹ McGivern, Cecil, “New Pattern in BBC Television Programmes”, *Radio Times*, 16 September 1955, p.15

³² Murray, Andy, *Into the Unknown: The Fantastic Life of Nigel Kneale* (London: Headpress, 2006) p.47

³³ Quoted in Murray, *Into the Unknown*, p.47

the film rights to any original work that they produced; even though the BBC said that this would be a part of standard contracts from that point onwards, they were unprepared to make Kneale's contract the first to contain that concession. While Kneale did eventually sign a two-year contract with the BBC, as he had been effectively working within its terms for some time, it was backdated and so concluded at the end of 1956, at which point Kneale went freelance. In the mean time, he scripted *Quatermass II*, discussed below, drawing on his history with the Corporation to provide another success at their request, while also expressing some of his feelings about creative and individual freedom.

One of the scripts that Kneale produced under this contract was *The Creature*, which concerned an expedition to the Himalayas on the trail of the Abominable Snowman. The television drama critic for *The Listener* noted that the play "should have been a national sensation akin to '1984' (which had the same script writer). It was no such thing."³⁴ In its review of *The Creature*, *The Times* also noted that "Mr Kneale is the young television playwright who adapted *1984*,"³⁵ showing that reputations within television were being recognised more widely, with the review also mentioning "that good television actor Mr. Peter Cushing".³⁶ As with *The Quatermass Experiment* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Kneale also contributed a small article to the *Radio Times* about the production. Such promotional articles for a play or serial were a frequent part of the *Radio Times* in the period, although they were by no means regular, and there were many productions which received their promotion through an interview with the writer rather than an article by the writer themselves. Nevertheless, this focus on the writer rather than the producer, director or star emphasises how important this figure was in the promotion of different dramas.

Like *The Listener*'s reviewer, the reviewer for *The Times* also found the production lacking, noting that "Unhappily, the play in performance hovered always

³⁴ Hope-Wallace, Philip, "Critic on the Hearth", *The Listener*, 3 February 1955, p.213

³⁵ Anon., "Quest Play on Television", *The Times*, 31 January 1955, p.10

³⁶ Anon., "Quest Play on Television", p.10

upon the margin of the ludicrous, and alas, often overstepped it.”³⁷ The reviewer went on to consider the reasons behind this:

nothing could raise it from the banal level of its dialogue and narrative. The main trouble presumably lies in the subject. In real life the creature, whose existence we suspect but whom no one has ever seen, is a being of a mystery older than time; in a play he can never escape from being the puppet of the author who controls his movements. Certainly Mr. Kneale’s *yeti* in his big animal mask never became any more of a reality than the team of explorers with the attitudes and ideas of schoolboys who set out to catch him.³⁸

The reviews from both *The Times* and *The Listener* indicate that the basic concept of the production was flawed, and the script was lacking. Kneale’s use of the yeti as a central object of pursuit was, like his use of Westminster Abbey as the setting for the climactic events of *The Quatermass Experiment*, rooted in well-publicised events of 1953. The “conquest” of Everest brought the region and its mythology to public attention, including tales of the yeti, its elusiveness, and attempts to identify it. The creature made a fit Macguffin for a story about obsession, but the public interest in the yeti may have acted against this: the expectation was of a revelation about the creature itself, rather than the focus on the people searching for it.

This expectation would have been fuelled by reading the *Radio Times* article which accompanied the broadcast of *The Creature*, where Kneale wrote, “Is there, after all, some prosaic explanation for the footprints? Or does the *yeti* exist? If so, what can it be? *The Creature*, in purely fictional terms, is a guess at the answers.”³⁹ The revelations that were supplied were subservient to the purpose of the script in making points about human nature and the perils of exploiting the natural world alongside humanity’s apparent urge to kill and destroy before trying to understand. Nevertheless, despite the critical view of the piece as a failure, Hammer eventually opted to take the latest Nigel Kneale script and ask him to adapt it for the cinema as *The Abominable Snowman* (1957). Despite the delay between the television production and the film, this suggests that they still recognised the importance of Kneale and his creations to their own history.

³⁷ Anon., “Quest Play on Television”, p.10

³⁸ Anon., “Quest Play on Television”, p.10

³⁹ Kneale, Nigel, “The Creature”, *Radio Times*, 28 January 1955, p.14

The usefulness of the sequel is partly that it allows the further development of existing characters, but also that it allows the refinement of the format. Kneale was clearly well aware of the importance of meeting viewer expectations, and those of his superiors within the BBC, with regards to what a Quatermass serial “should” contain, as illustrated by his memo to Cecil McGivern which notes:

I have tried to make this serial as effective as its predecessor, but in quite a different way: a logical extension. Given the publicly-expected components of the dogged professor, rocketry and things from space, in terms of (substantially) live television, the possibilities are not infinite, but I eventually worked out a story that seemed more than mere repetition.⁴⁰

Kneale goes on to note that the Viewer Appreciation Index for the first episode of *Quatermass II* was higher than for any episode of the first serial, and that interest in producing a film version had not only been received from Exclusive based on a reading of the script “a week before production commenced”, but that further enquiries had been received since screening of the serial had begun. “So,” Kneale concludes, “while acknowledging the undoubted excellence of Rudolph Cartier's production, it would seem that the script has its points too.”

The success of *Quatermass II* on television brought interest from both the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail* in publishing a fiction serial by the programme's author. Kneale eventually contracted with the *Daily Express*, but found that he suffered from “his customary wariness of prose writing”,⁴¹ and could not produce new material. Murray quotes Kneale as relating that, ““In the end, in a very depressed sort of way, they said, “Oh well, write the thing you’ve just put on the telly.””⁴² This shows that the demand was for Kneale as a writer rather than specifically for more Quatermass material. It is possible that the reason for avoiding Kneale’s most famous creation was to avoid any negotiations with the BBC regarding copyright and licensing, but if it was the character that was important to the *Daily Express*, then those discussions would have taken place immediately anyway.

⁴⁰Kneale, Nigel to Cecil McGivern, 5th November 1955, BBC WAC T5/2540/1

⁴¹Murray, *Into the Unknown*, p.52

⁴²Murray, *Into the Unknown*, p.52

This serialisation was not the only newspaper tie-in to the second Quatermass serial. The *Daily Herald* printed an article on how the effects for the serial were created⁴³ while the *Daily Sketch* planned an article with a photographic spread to appear at the end of the serial.⁴⁴ The *Picture Post* planned a 3-page spread on the drama, and the *Evening News* printed an interview about the script.⁴⁵ In addition, the programme was satirised on the BBC's *Fast and Loose*, in a sketch including the Winnerden Flats guards and the appearance of Monica Grey and Hugh Griffiths in their roles from *Quatermass II*.⁴⁶ This again illustrates the serial's position as something with which the BBC television audience could be readily supposed to be familiar and so something that was part of the BBC television identity beyond its own narrative and broadcast. The press interest in the writing and writer of the serial again emphasises the importance of the writer in establishing an identity for the BBC television service.

Conclusions

The perceived need to create, or at least reinforce, an identity for the BBC television service is clearly demonstrated by the corporation's return to previous successes in the form of sequels and the reuse of familiar authors. This chapter has also shown that this identity was one that strongly featured the science fiction genre, with *Quatermass II* being singled out as a highlight of the new season in competition with ITV. Kneale was also called upon to write *The Creature* and MacVicar's *Return to the Lost Planet* presented a serial for the children. The role of science fiction in this BBC identity, in other words, encompassed all forms of drama apart from single plays for children: that is, science fiction was represented in adult serials and single plays, together with the serials for children – themselves the next generation of television viewers whose loyalty to the station may have been sought as much as that of their parents. However, there is some question as to how

⁴³Letter, George Campey, Television Publicity Officer, to Miss D.Narracott of the *Daily Herald*, 28 November 1955, BBC WAC T5/2540/1

⁴⁴Letter, George Campey, Television Publicity Officer, to Mark Johns, 28th November 1955, BBC WAC T5/2540/1

⁴⁵Memo, Nigel Kneale to Cecil McGivern, C.P.Tel., 5th November 1955, BBC WAC T5/2540/1

⁴⁶Pixley, Andrew, "Viewing Notes", *The Quatermass Collection*, BBC DVD, 2005, p.26

successful the BBC were in creating a distinct identity. Turnock notes that, based on poll data from the time, “there was a large audience who saw no tangible distinction, or at least saw no distinction in terms of preference, between BBC and ITV in the early days.”⁴⁷ Of course, the ITV companies were full of production personnel who had been trained by the BBC, and the people with experience of writing for television were, largely, those who had worked for the BBC. Not only that, but the primary model that ITV had for forming its identity was the BBC television service, with the formation of an ITV identity being complicated by its formation from a number of different companies, each charged with maintaining a certain regional identity.

There is the further question of whether or not the identity that the BBC Television Service created for itself was one that viewers actually wanted to watch, if they were able to distinguish it from ITV. While it has been noted numerous times that the apparent success of ITV over the BBC in terms of viewing figures is distorted by the relative size of the audiences available to each broadcaster, there are also instances where there was at least a perceived difference between the two broadcasters. The child audience has been described as having been “spirited away to a commercial Neverland” by the arrival of ITV.⁴⁸ However, this is not to say that *Return to the Lost Planet* was representative of the programming that failed to retain the child audience. Indeed, it seems to fit more with the “action-based” drama which was increasingly used by the BBC after the arrival of ITV in order to regain some of their lost audience.⁴⁹

As we have seen in previous chapters, even the 1950s BBC television service was not averse to seeing its properties developed across multiple media platforms. *The Quatermass Experiment* was not just a television serial, it was also a film and a published screenplay; *The Lost Planet* was a television version of the novelisation of a successful radio serial which had already spawned radio sequels. Even Mr Turnip, the puppet presenter of *Whirligig* (the magazine programme which contained

⁴⁷Turnock, *Television and Consumer Culture*, p.28

⁴⁸ Buckingham, David, Hannah Davies, Ken Jones and Peter Kelley, *Children's Television in Britain* (London: BFi Publishing, 1999) p.14

⁴⁹ See Buckingham *et al.*, *Children's Television in Britain*, pp.22-23

Stranger From Space), was turned into toys and made the star of his own comic strip.

Of course, the driving force for most of these merchandising activities was not the BBC itself. As a public service broadcaster, such mercantilist imperatives were not to be stressed. Instead, the BBC was approached by other media producers, such as film production companies and book and comic publishers, who saw a value in properties derived from radio and television. As regards the programmes discussed in this thesis, it appears that the majority of inquiries regarding licensing of science fiction material were passed readily, with little concern for the details of the deal.

However, this does not mean that the BBC was completely blind to the importance of consistency in a property, or of the way that a licensed product could reflect upon the Corporation. Indeed, income gained from licensing deals and overseas sales became increasingly important as a supplement to the television licence fee, allowing the BBC to invest more money into its programming so that it could compete with the independent companies in terms of production values. This marketing also spread an image of the BBC and its properties, reinforcing ideas of the corporation within the public, and ensuring a sense of familiarity. In the face of competition, the BBC had to become a brand.

Chapter Eight:

The Desire for Individuality

Introduction

Faced with the issue of direct competition in television broadcasting, the BBC Television Service responded in a number of ways. It became more organised along committee and management lines, although this was not only a response to competition, but also a result of the growth of the organisation. Asa Briggs noted that:

there were complaints from many sides in 1954 and 1955, echoed outside the BBC, that Television was becoming ‘committee-bound’ just when it needed most to be flexible and that too many programmes were ‘committee jobs’.¹

In this climate, it seems little wonder that the theme of the artistic individual opposing the bureaucratic mass became more important to those on the creative side of programming. Joanne Hollows has identified much the same reaction in “the classic period of Hollywood cinema [when] many screenwriters felt undervalued and exploited by the managers of the studios.”² These feelings led to “hostility to economic capital”, with the result that:

although they must deliver commercial films to be employed, this doesn’t mean that the films which they make will automatically support dominant economic interests.³

This chapter covers the importance of individuality as a theme in the science fiction programming of the period. It does this primarily through analysis of the play *The Voices* and through the work of Nigel Kneale. In addition, the importance of the theme in science fiction and in the culture of Britain in the mid-1950s in general is considered. This will help with the examination of the extent to which this theme was specific to science fiction television, and how much television science fiction was merely a part of a wider debate.

¹ Briggs, Asa, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Volume IV: Sound and Vision* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) p.988

² Hollows, Joanne, “Mass culture theory and political economy” in Joanne Hollows and Mark Jancovich (eds.), *Approaches to Popular Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) p.34

³ Ibid.

Individuality in Post-War British Society

Post-War Britain was a country dealing with the visible benefits of state control, as:

To maintain production levels and morale the State had intervened in the dreadful conditions in which many people lived. Now it was demonstrated, for all to see, that the employment, health, diet and housing of the great majority of people could be improved by State action.⁴

Many people had more to thank the state for than before, particularly with the development of the Welfare State from the William Beveridge Report of 1942, such as the implementation of a National Health Service in 1948. In this situation, it would seem reasonable that people would generally embrace the increased control, of information and behaviour, which inevitably accompanies the administration and enactment of such large, state-run schemes.

However, this was not entirely the case. The theme of the loss of individuality that can be perceived in television science fiction in 1954-1955 can be seen to relate to the feeling of the loss of individualism that D.E.Cooper has perceived as key to the rise of the “Angry Young Men” in the mid-1950s. While the war had required people to act together, to work together and to follow orders, it was also seen as allowing for individual heroism, which everyday life in post-war Britain did not present. More importantly, Cooper identifies a perception that the mid-1950s individual could no longer influence events, that everything was now governed by committees, boards and other official groups, with the result that:

Where men are not able to make themselves felt on the major issues, their impotence will soon turn to lack of interest. Interest in the major issues declining, it will be replaced by interest in the minor and the petty. Real heroism being impossible, petty heroes - film-stars, models - will be invented, and new epic battles will be fought and cheered on the charts of the hit-parade.⁵

In this view, not only was this loss of individual power a result of the increased social control of the time, but it also drove the individual away from any attempt to

⁴ Sinfield, Alan, “Culture, Consensus and Difference: Angus Wilson to Alan Hollinghurst”, in Alistair Davies and Alan Sinfield (eds), *British Culture of the Postwar: An Introduction to Literature and Society 1945-1999* (London: Routledge, 2000) p.83

⁵ Cooper, D.E., “Looking Back on Anger” in Bogdanor, Vernon and Robert Skidelsky (eds), *The Age of Affluence 1951-1964* (London: Macmillan, 1970) p.277

make a change, and into the arms of popular entertainment. The spread of popular culture, in other words, was a reflection of the loss of individual power.

Similarly, Christopher Booker has depicted the period of the early 1950s as one of control:

Through the years of austerity and rationing which lasted, in one form or another, until 1954, the long struggle to economic recovery made Britain a grey, serious and - with the passing of the brief burst of radical fervour which attended the coming of peace and the Labour election victory of 1945 - basically a conservative country.⁶

But he sees this conservative country as one which is a society with a pressure cooker element, one which was developing beneath the surface and which would ultimately be released:

Out of this comparative placidity, however, at the end of 1955 Britain suddenly entered on a period of upheaval. Within twelve months it was outwardly marked by a trail of signs, storms and sensations: the coming of commercial television, the rise of the Angry Young Men, the Suez crisis, the coming of the rock'n'roll craze, and even, after a period of comparative quiescence, the beginnings of a crime wave.

This particular period of upheaval lasted for about two and a half years. When it was over, Britain was a changed country. In common with other countries of the West, she had entered on the whole of that transformation which has since become such a dominant factor in the lives of all those who have lived through it. Its major ingredient has been a material prosperity unlike anything known before. With it have come that host of social phenomena which initially, in Britain and Western Europe, were loosely lumped together under the heading of 'Americanisation' - a brash, standardised mass-culture, centred on the enormously increased influence of television and advertising, a popular music more marked than ever by the hypnotic beat of jazz and the new prominence, as a distinct social force, given to teenagers and the young.⁷

The "hypnotic beat of jazz" was one that appealed to, amongst others, Kingsley Amis, whose survey of science fiction, *New Maps of Hell*, maintained a constant comparison between the genre and jazz. Amis would co-edit a series of science fiction anthologies in the 1960s, from *Spectrum* in 1961 to *Spectrum V* in 1966, with Robert Conquest, both being considered to be part of the Movement, a grouping of

⁶ Booker, Christopher, *The Neophiliacs: A Study of the Revolution in English Life in the Fifties and Sixties* (London: Collins, 1969) p.35

⁷ Ibid.

writers identified approximately as those included in the *New Lines* poetry anthology of 1956, but who themselves denied any formal grouping. Robert Hewison has argued that:

By taking an interest in jazz and science fiction the members of the Movement were by-passing the customary channels of taste, and showed that they had not lost touch with their lower middle-class, as opposed to gentry, roots. They were bringing into art aspects of life ignored by the Mandarins.⁸

This interest in engaging with areas of life and popular culture not dealt with by the culturally dominant class, which was considered also as being that which developed its tastes before the war, was typical of the Angry Young Men, another grouping with a name imposed upon it, of which Amis was also a part, following the publication of *Lucky Jim* in 1954.

Like those in the Movement, the Angry Young Men were those who had benefited from the Welfare State, but who now found themselves caught, like the scholarship boy of Richard Hoggart's *Uses of Literacy*, between two worlds. No longer a part of the communities which they had left in order to go to university, but still not a part of the ruling culture, they expressed resentment at the loss of one culture, at the promise of opportunities unfulfilled. It is, however, important to remember that this is largely the image that has been created of the Angry Young Men, and that, as Robert Hewison has put it, "some of them were not very angry, and some of them were not very young."⁹ In addition to Amis, at least one other of those generally identified as an Angry Young Man worked in science fiction: Colin Wilson, whose *The Outsider* (1956) has been identified as one of the originating texts in the myth of the Angry Young Man,¹⁰ would later write science fiction, including the novels *The Mind Parasites* (1967), *The Philosopher's Stone* (1969) and *The Space Vampires* (1976, filmed as *Lifeforce* [1985]). Part of the concerns that these writers expressed which helped them be identified as a group was with the failure of mandarin culture to recognise and show the changes in society since the

⁸ Hewison, Robert, *In Anger: Culture in the Cold War 1945-60* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981) p.115

⁹ Hewison, *In Anger*, p.129

¹⁰ See, for example, Hewison, *In Anger*, p.130 and Ritchie, Harry, "Look Back in Wonder", *The Guardian*, 12 August 2006

war. In handling this concern, these writers focussed on characters who represented otherwise largely unseen parts of society, people who lived explicitly in post-war, non-mandarin society and who expressed themselves as individuals rather than accepting their place within the status quo. However, it is important to recognise that the very fact that this “movement” could be identified with a few, specific writers indicates that, while it was a recognisable trend within British arts from the mid-1950s, it was a limited aspect of that arts culture, one that could be separated off to a certain degree. The Movement and the Angry Young Men may have rebelled against the mandarin culture, bringing into more general literary circles the themes that they found in their popular culture expressions of jazz and science fiction, but it was that mandarin culture that remained dominant throughout the period.

Science Fiction and Individuality

Within popular culture, however, the fantastic genres continued their use of the theme of the dangers of loss of individuality and the importance of the individual. The lone inventor, whose creations are inevitably lost with his demise, was a key figure in literary science fiction of the first half of the twentieth century, connected to a “Great Men” view of history built around figures like Darwin and Edison or, fictionally, Frankenstein and Cavor. However, while this character may be presented as an individual, as apart from the mass of humanity, Scott Sanders has argued that “in the twentieth century science fiction as a genre is centrally about the disappearance of character”.¹¹ His claim is that the genre:

reproduces the experience of living in a regimented, conformist society, within which the individual has become anonymous: persons are interchangeable, relating to each other through socially defined roles; actions are governed by procedure, and thus do not characterize the actor; emotion is repressed in favour of reason; the individual is subordinated to the system. Science itself, increasingly bureaucratized and collectivized, has fostered an impersonal model of knowledge which, however ill-suited to the actual work of scientists, has become the most influential epistemology in industrial civilization.¹²

¹¹ Sanders, Scott, “Characterization in science fiction: Two approaches, 1. The disappearance of character” in Patrick Parrinder, *Science Fiction: A critical guide* (London: Longman, 1979) pp.131-132

¹² Ibid. p.132

These lone geniuses are therefore merely representatives of science itself, but ones that were rapidly disappearing from the science fiction scene, as the awareness of the industrialised nature of scientific and technological research spread.

Patrick Parrinder agrees with Sanders' viewpoint, that the lack of individual characterisation within science fiction is, at least in part, a reflection of the impersonal scientific world-view. Parrinder explains that it is the novum itself, the new idea at the centre of the science fiction story, which is the most important part of such a story, that "In science fiction it is the new element, and not the need for subtle and rounded characterization, which determines the basic rules of the genre."¹³ However, J.P. Telotte has argued that science fiction film, as opposed to science fiction literature, contains "an emphasis on feelings, emotions and passion as a counterweight to the form's iconic enthronement of a reason-technology-science triad."¹⁴ Telotte argues that this concentration on human emotion acts as a measure of what is human against the technological environment, comparing the natural human value system against the artificial one of the scientific world. Indeed, this was the sort of counterweight that Nigel Kneale proposed viewers might have found in the character of Professor Quatermass, suggesting, regarding the success of *The Quatermass Experiment*, that "Perhaps it was the spectacle of a scientist having to clear up the mess he had made that struck a welcome note."¹⁵ The scientist, the representative of the technological, scientific worldview, was forced to deal with the human consequences of his experiment, something which would have had understandable appeal to people recovering from a technological war, and facing an increasingly rationalised society.

Reviewing the state of the science fiction film in 1959, and considering it to have already been "hideously transformed"¹⁶ in its decline from its origins with *Destination Moon* (1950), Richard Hodgens noted that "Many sf films derive

¹³ Parrinder, Patrick, "Characterization in science fiction: Two approaches, 2. The alien encounter: or, Ms Brown and Mrs Le Guin" in Patrick Parrinder, *Science Fiction: A critical guide*, p.152

¹⁴ Telotte, J.P., *Science Fiction Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p.140

¹⁵ Kneale, Nigel, "Quatermass: Another Adventure into the Unknown" in *Radio Times*, 19 December 1958, p.5

¹⁶ Hodgens, Richard, "A Brief, Tragical History of the Science Fiction Film", *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Winter, 1959) p.30

whatever emotional effect they have from their half-hearted allegorization of the conflict between individuality and conformity.”¹⁷ In Hodgens view, the threat of conformity is a threat in these films only because of the way that it is presented: as something imposed by a repulsive Other, or because it is in the nature of the central characters of a Hollywood popular narrative to act in favour of the status quo. Both reasons are essentially conservative, resistant not only to change but also to difference, and so the apparent narrative of “the conflict between individuality and conformity”, with its heroes on the side of individuality, is itself essentially conformist. However, Hodgens is clearly working from the point of view that any films addressing this conflict are doing so merely in an attempt to add some depth to their story, to give some motivation other than pure xenophobia and conservatism to the characters in their fight against the alien Other and its enforced conformity. Ursula Le Guin has also commented on the conservative nature of this support for the status quo, indicating that it is change of any kind that is feared rather than any particular horror that could be inflicted by the aliens or monsters, noting that “The only social change presented by most SF has been toward authoritarianism, [...] sometimes presented as a warning, but often quite complacently.”¹⁸

Susan Sontag also saw the conflict between individuality and conformity as key to the science fiction film. Like Hodgens, she considered this as a device from the horror tradition dressed up in science fiction trappings, noting that:

As the victim always backs away from the vampire’s horrifying embrace, so in science fiction films the person always fights being ‘taken over’: he wants to retain his humanity.¹⁹

However, unlike Hodgens, Sontag perceived that the use of this conflict did have meaning. Noting that the victims of such dehumanising possession become “more efficient – the very model of technocratic man, purged of emotions, volitionless, tranquil, obedient to all orders”,²⁰ Sontag notes that the difference between

¹⁷ Hodgens, Richard, “A Brief, Tragical History of the Science Fiction Film”, p.37

¹⁸ Le Guin, Ursula K., “American SF and the Other” in Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction* (London: The Women’s Press, 1989) p.85

¹⁹ Sontag, Susan, “The Imagination of Disaster” in Gilbert Adair (ed.), *Movies* (London: Penguin, 1999), p.181

²⁰ Sontag, “The Imagination of Disaster”, p.182

possession in supernatural horror and in science fiction is that in the former, dehumanisation led to a release of the animal within, while in science fiction, the transformation is into a machine. The fear here is of the dehumanising, mechanised, technological society, the same fear that Telotte discusses and which Mark Jancovich has discussed in relation to American horror and science fiction of the 1950s.²¹

John Brosnan has argued that the fear of loss of individuality to an all-powerful government bureaucracy is particularly British, as Britain is “a physically small country with a strongly centralized government”.²² The British television science fiction that has already been discussed in this thesis presents a number of examples of this theme of individuality versus incorporation and dehumanisation, particularly in relation to the advance of mechanised, industrialised and corporatised society. In *R.U.R.* it is the efficient, mechanical horde that is to be feared, the product, literally, of an industrialised society. *The Time Machine* presents a future where the rational individual, the Time Traveller, is threatened by the monstrous Morlocks, who are themselves the guardians and users of what technology remains, and the descendants of the workers of the industrialised Victorian society in which the novel originates. Both narratives also show the other side of this industrialised society, in the ineffective middle-class of *R.U.R.* and their descendants, the Eloi, who have lost all inclination to do anything except play. *Take Back Your Freedom* showed the appeal of authoritarianism and how it could develop in Britain. *Stranger From Space* presents individuals as heroes and authority as threatening, if largely through misunderstanding and inertia rather than through any evil intent. *No Smoking!* illustrated the interconnectedness of business and governments. *The Lost Planet* and its sequel also present the lone inventor against corporate and state interests.

The most prolific television writer on these themes, if only because he is the most prolific genre writer of the period, is Nigel Kneale, responsible for the

²¹ See Jancovich, Mark, *Rational Fears: American horror in the 1950s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996)

²² Brosnan, John, *Future Tense: The Cinema of Science Fiction* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1978) p.114

adaptations of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *Mystery Story* and *Number Three*, as well as for the Quatermass serials and *The Creature*. The importance of this theme of the individual versus conformity through Kneale's work will be considered later in this chapter, but first the chapter will consider this theme in an adaptation by the other founding member of the BBC Script Unit, George F.Kerr.

The Voices (1955)

The Voices concerns the Earth of 2021, governed by InterCos, led by Dr. Werner, who supports human expansion through the solar system and, ultimately, beyond. The launch of a second orbital station, Platform Beta, nears, which will expand human settlement to Mars orbit and provide a stepping-stone for further exploration and colonisation. However, Earth has been receiving signals from space, the Voices of the Ampiti, which are taken as a warning against continued expansion. Werner, supported by the Russian and Chinese delegates and opposed primarily by Britain, Ireland and America, initially continues with the launch plans, then declares that he is acceding to the believed Ampiti demands and halting the construction of Beta, while actually continuing with the plans to launch. Meanwhile, Mark Harrison, the scientist who has been most closely analysing the transmissions from the Ampiti, concludes that the aliens have a spy in InterCos, relaying information telepathically. The Ampiti arrive at Earth, easily defeating all attempts to combat them and launching attacks on the planet itself. Harrison determines that Werner's aide is the unwitting spy and manages to send a message of peace, as Werner is unseated from his leadership and peace signals are sent out by InterCos. The bombing of Earth stops.

The central conflict of *The Voices* was established by its adaptor, George F.Kerr, in a *Radio Times* preview as being one of the independent scientist against government bureaucracy:

For some months, Vernon-Cavendish and his Counsellor, Neil Harrison, have been receiving alarming reports from Neil's brother Mark, a distinguished scientist. But the reports have been pigeon-holed and Vernon-Cavendish and the other delegates assemble in the Council Chamber in the Palace of InterCos to hear Dr. Werner's speech proposing the date for the launching of Platform Beta.

It is at this moment in the history of the world that high-powered radio telescopes on Earth pick up and record across millions of miles - The Voices. Clearly, Mark Harrison's warnings were justified. But it may be they have come too late.²³

Based on this description, it is clear that *The Voices* presents, as does *Quatermass II*, a lone scientist whose warnings are ignored by government until it is too late. The rationality of these warnings is initially questioned in the script by making Mark occasionally irrational due to radiation poisoning, but his general ideas are corroborated so quickly that this questioning is fairly irrelevant, even though it is still occasionally raised even after his ideas have proven to be generally correct. Similarly, the conspiracy angle, whereby Mark identifies that the Ampiti must be gaining information from a spy, is only raised in the latter part of the play, and then is not used in a way which generates much tension. No wonder that *The Listener's* reviewer considered the play to be "feeble" and "not adult drama at all – rather, children playing at frightening themselves",²⁴ as any element of suspense seems to have been removed from the plot, and key events tend to happen off-screen, to be described by characters in rather declamatory conversations on-screen.

Regardless of its execution, the piece does correspond to a number of themes common to the science fiction discussed in this thesis. *The Times'* reviewer saw the theme of the play to be one of "cosmic ambition in the interplanetary era",²⁵ following the basic narrative in that this does appear to be what the Ampiti are warning against. However, while this is clearly one interpretation of the play, the overriding theme, based on a reading of the camera script, is that of the individual versus the impersonal, secretive organisation. Except that here the individuals, for they act in a group, are the freethinking British, Irish and, to a lesser extent, American politicians and the British scientist Mark Harrison, and the important thing about them is that they work through democratic process in order to replace an autocratic leader who has manipulated the system. Freedom of the press is considered to be beneficial, as Neil Harrison uses it, in an act of career suicide, to let

²³ Kerr, George F., "The Voices from Outer Space", *Radio Times*, 14 January 1955, p.14

²⁴ Hope-Wallace, Philip, "The Critic on the Hearth – The Voice of Hysteria", *The Listener*, 20 January 1955, p.125

²⁵ Anon., "Space Play on Television", *The Times*, 17 January 1955, p.5

the world know about Werner's plans and actions that are leading the world to its doom. The ultimate hope for the world is presented as being openness, "More light on everything",²⁶ as the new world leader calls for at the end of the play. It is the way that Werner could manage information, through closed sessions and secret communications, that led to his gathering of power and his ability to continue with his plans even while saying that he was doing otherwise. Again, this is similar to the concern with secret committees and groups controlling information and making decisions which affect everyone without consulting them that can be seen in *Quatermass II*, and which reflected contemporary concerns about official groups and state control of people's lives, as discussed above.

Secret government committees deciding people's futures were not the only contemporary concern connected to by the play. The villains of the piece are the German, Dr. Werner, whose "German Jewish accent" was "a symbol of villainy, apparently",²⁷ and who is supported by the Leader Balatov of the USSR and Lord Hsuan, "the Emperor of China"²⁸. While this last suggests that China has thrown off its Communism, the return to an apparently feudal system, echoed in the Indian delegate being Prince Dhevu, contains suggestions not only of an old enemy as found in many stories of the "Yellow Peril", but also of an autocratic approach. The name "Werner" seems likely to have been inspired by Wernher von Braun, the German rocket scientist who created the V2 ballistic missile which was used by the Nazis, and who was then taken on by the American rocket programme. This connection is emphasised by Werner's championing of a space programme which will lead to "Space without end – Man's Empire",²⁹ but which results in bombs falling on London, along with other cities.

Regardless of whether it was a success, as *The Times'* reviewer thought, or a failure, as *The Listener's* reviewer considered it, *The Voices* serves as another example of the importance of the idea of resistance to secretive government that runs

²⁶ Kerr, George F., *The Voices* Camera Script, held by BBC Written Archives Centre, p.83

²⁷ Hope-Wallace, Philip, "The Critic on the Hearth – The Voice of Hysteria", *The Listener*, 20 January 1955, p.125

²⁸ Kerr, George F., *The Voices* Camera Script, p.52

²⁹ Kerr, George F., *The Voices* Camera Script, p.7

throughout science fiction. This theme found a more consistent consideration through the science fiction work of Nigel Kneale.

Nigel Kneale

While Andy Murray has claimed that Nigel Kneale's "usual preoccupations" are "the old in conflict with the new",³⁰ the theme of individuality and the threat of incorporation recurs throughout Kneale's work, particularly the Quatermass serials. The central threat in *The Quatermass Experiment* is absorption into a single alien mass, which is only defeated by Quatermass urging the already absorbed astronauts to exert their individual humanity against that alien mass. *Quatermass II* (1955), as is discussed further below, has an alien intelligence which controls humans, destroying their individuality, as its main threat, which James Chapman has identified as placing it in the sub-genre of "the paranoid sf thriller".³¹ *Quatermass and the Pit* (1958-1959) features an alien influence which causes those in whom Martian-originated genetic traits are strongest to form a psychic mob which acts as one to attack and kill the individuals who do not share those traits. Even the divided society of *Quatermass* (1979) is split into a number of unified groups, following orders in the case of the pay-cops, following alien-embedded instinct in the case of the Planet People, following urges to violence in the case of the street gangs. Only the individualistic scientists, called upon because they have knowledge but also because they will challenge each other to come up with a solution to this alien threat, act independently to resolve the problem.

Kneale's theme of the importance of individuality is also illustrated when *The Creature's* yeti-hunter, ironically named Friend, sets out to do things differently from the prescribed method by using caches of supplies rather than a large team of porters. He points out that:

No expedition's ever got near this thing. Why? Because they trampled up there like an invading army, with fifty to sixty porters behind them. That

³⁰ Murray, Andy, *Into the Unknown: The Fantastic Life of Nigel Kneale* (London: Headpress, 2006) p.166

³¹ Chapman, James, "Quatermass and the Origins of British Television SF" in John R. Cook and Peter Wright (eds), *British Science Fiction Television: A Hitchhiker's Guide* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2006) p.34

number of men was indispensable – but they'd scare off every wild thing in the area, from birds to beetles. We don't do that.³²

By rejecting accepted wisdom, and by operating as a small team of individuals rather than as a large group, Friend succeeds in finding the yeti. However, as his motives are selfish and commercial, in that he wants to trap a yeti, and is prepared to kill it if necessary, rather than simply to observe one, his expedition is doomed.

Friend could be understood as a Kneale identification character, particularly when he talks about:

radio, television, magazines – [...] these things have done new wonderful work – gone into the very homes of people, stirred them into healthy curiosity about the earth they live on. Those are the people I work for.³³

Yet Friend is a shyster, a showman, inventing things because they are what he thinks people want. Rollason, the chief scientist on the expedition, survives because he understands that communication and understanding are more important than serving the masses' desire for the spectacle of a yeti corpse. The conflicting attitudes embodied in these two characters could also be interpreted as reflecting Kneale's conflicted attitudes about working for the BBC, where he not only had to deal with increasing bureaucratisation, but also with the desire not to disturb people, as was discussed in relation to his adaptation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Similarly, the co-option of Quatermass' design for the lunar base by the bureaucratic group-mind of the aliens in *Quatermass II* could be read as an echo of Kneale's feelings about his creation being taken over by an increasingly bureaucratized BBC.

As with *The Voices*, in *The Creature* some contact is made between the species through a telepathic relay. This emphasises the importance of communication in ensuring co-existence and in obtaining and sharing information. The bureaucracy of InterCos in *The Voices*, the conspiracy of the alien-possessed in *Quatermass II*, the all-seeing eye of Big Brother and the thought-changing language of Newspeak in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: all of these prevent or hinder the sharing of information and ideas, thereby seeking to control thought and action. The individual relies upon information and communication in order to create, develop and share

³²Kneale, Nigel, *The Creature* Camera Script, held by BBC WAC, p.14

³³ Kneale, *The Creature*, p.35

their ideas. The heroic individual works for the community in maintaining these channels for the free exchange of ideas, and for the opportunity to have original and individual ideas.

Quatermass II and Rationalisation

Quatermass II opens on the turning dishes of two mobile radar units, immediately implying the idea of military, and thus state, surveillance and control. The trainee who spots the incoming alien projectile is ultimately told to simply report his expected target when it appeared, “nothing else”, illustrating how authority can easily control information and behaviour. It is also quickly made explicit that there are orders from higher authorities than the officers present not to investigate the fall of these projectiles. This culture of military secrecy, with its echoes of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is carried through the serial, invading civilian life, particularly in the work camp attached to the alien base at Winnerden Flats, where the office of the “Camp Voluntary Committee” is decorated with signs reading “Remember – SECRET means SEALED LIPS!”, “TALK ABOUT YOUR JOB – AND LOSE IT!” and “CHATTER spells CATASTROPHE”.³⁴ These signs were specifically requested to be “reminiscent of those used in wartime”,³⁵ reminding citizens that “Careless Talk Costs Lives”, “Be Like Dad – Keep Mum!”, or “Your Talk May Kill Your Comrades”.

The bulldozing of the original Winnerden Flats village, including an “Ivy Cottage”, the name plate for which Quatermass finds, illustrates the way that the alien-led organisation aims to crush human individuality and society. As Rob Turnock has noted:

The disappointment of the picnicking woman and the displacement of the worker’s wife articulate an anxiety about social and geographical change. The new town and the chemical plant have spoilt the countryside and the workers, albeit voluntarily, have been displaced from their traditional homes and communities. As the episode develops it transpires that the chemical plant, surrounded by murderous armed guards, is a breeding ground for aliens planning to take over the world. As the fictional articulation of a cultural

³⁴Kneale, Nigel, *Quatermass II*, episode 2, camera script held by BBC WAC, p.10

³⁵ Memo, Rudolph Cartier to Assistant to Supply Manager, 21 October 1955, BBC WAC T5/2540/1

anxiety about the rash of new, hi-tech and sometimes secret installations sprouting up around the country, *Quatermass II* is perhaps peerless.³⁶

The way that the tramp played by Wilfrid Bramble emerges from underneath the mound of the bulldozed Ivy Cottage acts as a symbol of the way that humanity can survive even the crushing tactics of the aliens. In the same way Captain Dillon's humanity manages to emerge from under the alien control at a vital point. This is also the way that Quatermass manages to save the world from the alien creature in *The Quatermass Experiment*, by appealing to the humanity underlying the alien which contains Carroon and his fellow absorbed astronauts. Quatermass makes a similar appeal to Dillon in *Quatermass II* which begins the process of Dillon breaking free of his alien possession and regaining his individuality.

Intellect without imagination - mechanical ability, as demonstrated by Quatermass' co-worker Pugh - is a particular liability, signalling a particularly rational way of thinking. Joy Leman associates this way of thinking with masculinity and assigns it to Quatermass, claiming that Pugh - alongside "the female assistants" and "a skilled worker" - represents "intuitive, emotional ways of responding",³⁷ an alternative to Quatermass' rationality. Yet Pugh's possession occurs without even direct contact with the alien, he has been so reduced to a biological computer, becoming the embodiment of the scientific, technocratic society. His impending possession by the alien intelligence is first signalled by Pugh running through a number of mathematical operations, remembering his childhood as a mathematical prodigy. This reflection back to his youth shows how the rational society shapes the individual to fit a role within that society from childhood, making them unable to fill any other role or to form their own individual identity.

The workers, however, do not even have to be possessed, because they have no power and are used to acting as a group. They are also "bought out" by better pay and better working conditions. Ironically, the fact that they are used to working as a group is their strength as well as their weakness, all they need is to be guided by a

³⁶Turnock, Rob, *Television and Consumer Culture: Britain and the Transformation of Modernity* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2007) p.121

³⁷Leman, Joy, "Wise Scientists and Female Androids: Class and Gender in Science Fiction" in John Corner (ed.), *Popular Television in Britain: Studies in Cultural History* (London: BFi Publishing, 1991) p.113

superior intellect, such as Quatermass'. Or, rather, they are portrayed as "Tommys", non-commissioned soldiers who respond to Quatermass as the representative of the officer class, which is ironic considering Quatermass' antagonistic reaction to Colonel Breen and his military mind-set in *Quatermass and the Pit*. However, they are fulfilling what Ursula K. LeGuin has identified as the role of the mass of people in the majority of literary science fiction: "The people, in SF, are not people. They are masses, existing for one purpose: to be led by their superiors."³⁸ Nevertheless, it is important to remember that, while the workers may seem to be willing to respond to any leader and incapable of autonomous action, it is, as Joy Leman has pointed out, "the upper-class characters with vested interests embedded in rigid power structures – army officers, top civil servants and scientists" who are more liable to be taken over by the aliens.³⁹

When Cecil McGivern described the developments in BBC television following the extension of broadcasting hours, the first drama that he specifically mentions in his article is "a sequel to the extremely successful *Quatermass Experiment* by Nigel Kneale".⁴⁰ This not only shows the BBC's acknowledgement of *The Quatermass Experiment*'s achievement, but also its recognition of Kneale as a name which the television audience might recognise, alongside others mentioned in McGivern's article, such as the successful playwright and novelist Francis Durbridge and novelist Frank Tilsley. This focus on established successful product fits with Rob Turnock's argument that:

the expansion of television broadcasting in this period [the 1950s and 1960s] both required and promoted the expansion of bureaucratic and capitalist *rationality*. In the 1950s and 1960s the process in broadcasting marked a crucial step towards post-modernity where the expansion of capitalist markets was accompanied by an intertwining of state control, bureaucracy and industrial process in which culture became increasingly commoditized.⁴¹

³⁸ Le Guin, "American SF and the Other" in *The Language of the Night*. p.84

³⁹ Leman, Joy, "Wise Scientists and Female Androids" in Corner (ed.), *Popular Television in Britain*, p.111

⁴⁰ McGivern, Cecil, "New Pattern in BBC Television Programmes", *Radio Times*, 16 September 1955, p.15

⁴¹ Turnock, *Television and Consumer Culture*, p.16

Sequelisation, as discussed in the previous chapter, is an aspect of this process of developing a more industrialised approach to television production, one with an arguably more homogenised product. The threat was that the BBC would demand a Quatermass sequel that simply replicated the original serial, removing originality and devaluing the ideas through mechanical reproduction. Kneale's response was to create a production that dramatised that threat, as Quatermass faces the perils of bureaucracy and loss of individual identity. Turnock sees the expansion of television in this period as beneficial, with the increased industrialisation leading to "an increasing diversity of broadcast outputs and genres [which] made visible disparate aspects of British society and culture and brought them together in a unified cultural form characterized especially by the mixed-programme schedule."⁴² However, this view presents a rosy picture of the end result of the process of the development of television as a business, disregarding the fears of loss of diversity brought about by the need to present a distinct identity in the face of competition.

Turnock presents television itself as a part of the sense of omnipresent and oppressive authority during this period, associating the "intimate" mode of presentation with:

an erosion of the boundaries between the public and private spheres. In a society characterized by welfarism and state bureaucracy, the daily presentation of the world of politics and international events in news and current affairs programming may have made the sphere of government seem omnipresent and oppressive.⁴³

This vision of television as a conveyor of official reports and government viewpoints echoes *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, with its constant stream of updates, news and instructions from government-run televisions. However, as Turnock goes on to note, unlike the broadcasts of Airstrip One, the BBC, like ITV, produced a schedule of mixed programming, which included entertainment alongside news and current affairs and documentaries. In this way, he argues, television offered a broad view of society, as prone to mocking news and authority, or simply focussing on the domestic or the curious, as it was to expressing the views of authority. With this breadth of content, television "constructed and perpetuated the sense that television

⁴² Turnock, *Television and Consumer Culture*, p.17

⁴³ Turnock, *Television and Consumer Culture*, pp.139-140

connected its viewers to the central institutions and concerns of society”.⁴⁴ What this also meant was that television could connect its viewers to concerns *about* those central institutions, as the works of Nigel Kneale clearly demonstrate.

Conclusions

Science fiction as a genre had long been concerned with issues of individuality and the potential loss of humanity to increased social control. The reorganisation of society along scientific and industrial lines that had been advancing since the Industrial Revolution and which was indicated in works like Wells’ *The Time Machine* (1895) and Čapek’s *R.U.R.* (1921), was becoming a more general social concern within the 1950s. The increasing rationalisation of industry and society, continuing trends and behaviours rendered necessary within wartime, made the science fictional engagement with these concerns more obviously relevant to a broader audience. On a smaller scale, the increased bureaucratisation of the BBC itself may also have influenced writers, such as Nigel Kneale, in their development of their scripts for the Television Service, as it had influenced George Orwell in his creation of the organisations that run Airstrip One in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

However, the very development of this bureaucratised BBC was due to its growth and change as an organisation, and particularly the need for the Television Service to deal with competition. As the Service called for more recreation of past successes, to reinforce a particular image of the BBC Television Service and to retain its audience, the opportunities for individual experimentation and expression became more limited. At the same time, the arrival of ITV did offer new markets for television writers like Kneale and, with his BBC contract completed by the delivery of *Quatermass II*, that is where Kneale took his expertise, but working as a freelancer, not as a contracted staff member.

⁴⁴ Turnock, *Television and Consumer Culture*, p.140

Conclusions: Genre, Taste and the BBC

British Science Fiction Television During the BBC Monopoly

Having begun as an occasional adaptation, not even recognised as a genre in itself, television science fiction developed from the beginning of British television in the late 1930s to become an integral part of television programming by the mid-1950s. It had not only generated entertainment and filled broadcasting hours, but had produced an iconic character in Professor Bernard Quatermass, and operated as a way of tackling contemporary issues that was recognised through the furore around *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. At these moments, television as a medium had worked its way further into British cultural life and the consciousness of the nation. Far from being a minority genre, science fiction has thus played a major role in the growth and establishment of the BBC Television Service.

This thesis has traced the development of a particular television genre, science fiction, within a particular context: the evolution of the BBC Television Service from its launch in 1936, through to the arrival of competition in 1955. Throughout this historical period, British television dealt with an enormous growth in audience numbers, from the handful within range of the Alexandra Palace transmitter who had watched the experimental broadcasts, to the 93% of the population who were within BBC transmitter range in 1955,¹ of which 4.5 million had television licences.² This expansion of the audience meant that the people responsible for producing television programming not only had to cater for more people, but also for a wider range of people.

As **Section One: The Development of Style** has shown, this expansion of the audience led to an increasingly conservative approach in terms of visual stylisation of science fiction drama. Where early productions were experimental in their editing and their use of effects, using the low-resolution, low-contrast television

¹ See Belson, William A., *The Impact of Television: Methods and Findings in Program Research* (London: Crosby Lockwood & Son, 1967) p.214. In 1955, only 24% of the country's population was within reach of an ITV transmitter, the same proportion that was within reach of a BBC television transmitter in 1936.

² *Ibid.*, p.213

of the time to offer a more impressionistic approach to productions, the expansion of the television audience led to an increasing reliance on the concept of “realism”.

This developed an idea that had been present since the start of television broadcasts in Britain, of television as a relay of events happening somewhere else at the moment of broadcast. However, it also stemmed from a desire to be less challenging to the audience. This desire stemmed from an understanding of the BBC’s own research into its audience which showed that the viewing public was spreading “downwards” through society, and that those of “the ‘lower’ groups tend to view more than the ‘higher’.”³

Such concerns with audiences, and particularly audience taste, drive **Section Two: The Development of Genre** and **Section Three: Televisual Revolutions**.

Section Two is particularly concerned with the way that genres themselves develop, and how media and national specificity are key to these developments. Fears surrounding Americanisation and British national culture formed a focus for issues of class and taste in the period under study, which could be seen in the rejection of the term “science fiction” by the BBC in favour of the European “scientific romance”. However, the development of an awareness of genre in British television also shows just how subjective the understanding and interpretation of genre is: the BBC may use particular associations with “scientific romance” or the thriller, but that does not stop viewers interpreting productions as horror, or this thesis labelling them as science fiction. This emphasises the issues around any genre-based study, such as this one, where care has to be taken with the way that labelling a production as belonging to a particular genre can narrow the range of interpretations of that text, and particularly narrow considerations of how the audience(s) may have interpreted it.

Nevertheless, some narrowing of interpretation is necessary simply for the scope of this project, and this thesis has shown how the BBC Television Service itself developed some understanding of the issues surrounding the use of genre labels and the way that they could be interpreted by the audience. In particular, the narrowing of interpretation that is caused by applying a genre label to a specific

³ Silvey, Robert, “Viewers, Viewing and Leisure” in *BBC Quarterly*, Vol. VII, No.1, Spring 1952, p.36

production may well have been avoided because of fears of narrowing down the appeal of a drama to too small an audience. This seems particularly relevant to science fiction, easily dismissed in the period through its relation to cheap and garish American pulps and comics, or to serials concerning the adventures of heroes like Flash Gordon, when the BBC was producing science fiction that fitted into a number of sub-genres that were less well-known as part of genre science fiction and which had their own literary history and legitimacy: the pastoral, the alternate history, the children's adventure story. There was also a likely avoidance of populist genre labels as a way of defending the perceived quality of the BBC's output. The early 1950s saw the development of a strain of television that we can now identify as science fiction, varied in its expression, but united in its coverage of themes such as the value and dangers of technology, particularly in relation to labour and industry, as well as with Britain's changing status in the world.

Section Three: Televisual Revolutions showed how science fiction made its mark on British television through Nigel Kneale's *The Quatermass Experiment* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. However, it also raised questions about the myths that have grown up around these canonical texts, and so about the construction of television history. While acknowledging the efforts of Kneale and producer Rudolph Cartier to expand the scope of television drama narratives beyond the conventions of the "intimate screen", this section interrogates the reasons for the canonisation of these productions. Intersection with royal events played its part, with *The Quatermass Experiment* intentionally drawing upon audience familiarity with Westminster Abbey as the recent location of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II while also engaging with the recently expanded television audience associated with that event, while the repeat of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was arguably only broadcast because of royal approval. Comparison of these two Kneale / Cartier productions with other science fiction of this year and earlier reveals that they had little originality in terms of narrative and theme, but that the combination of talents in the presentation of the pieces seems to have provided their initial success. Their place in the canon of television history was secured by a level of myth-making by Kneale and Cartier to develop their notoriety, while Quatermass' return in subsequent serials together with film and book versions helped maintain the character in the popular memory, and the

fact that these productions are actually available for viewing, to varying degrees, helped to maintain them within the largely text-based field of television studies.

The process of success, repetition and development that the Quatermass serials underwent reflects the need for the BBC Television Service to develop a particular identity in order to face the impending competition of commercial television in 1954-5, as covered in **Section Four: “More Than Mere Repetition”: “Sequelisation” and the Question of Identity**. This period contains a number of examples of science fiction sequels or transfers of material across media, from radio to television, and from radio and television to novels, which would have reinforced ideas of what the BBC product was through the display of a consistent brand. However, other, earlier productions had also had a degree of cross-media development or adaptation and reproduction, particularly in the science fiction genre, which had relied heavily on adaptation from stage and prose, but had also drawn upon radio (which had also spun-off into film with productions such as *Spaceways* [radio 1952, film Hammer Film Productions / Lippert Pictures, 1953]) and in turn been spun off into novels. This not only places science fiction at the centre of a web of interacting projections of a BBC image, but also reinforces the importance of recognising that science fiction is a multimedia genre, with different expressions in different media, but also with many interconnections between these media.

This thesis has examined the development of this programming by attempting to investigate all of the productions that fit into the genre of “science fiction” within the period under study, rather than taking a case study approach. While issues of selection and identification of these programmes remain, including the possibility that some productions remain unidentified due to insufficient information,⁴ this approach allows for the tracing of possible connections between the various texts, and gives a sense of the development of the genre that a case study approach cannot. This historical approach also tries to avoid the issue of reinforcing the canonisation of particular texts and serves partly to present unfamiliar

⁴ Productions of *The Parasite* (11 September 1953), *Mac and the Atom* (27 May 1955) and *A Space-Suit for Johnny* (30 September 1954) were investigated as far as was possible through the material available at the BBC Written Archives Centre, but were ultimately rejected as not fitting the definition of “science fiction” as used for this thesis. However, very little information was available on *The Parasite* or *A Space-Suit for Johnny*, and further research might reveal that they do, in fact, fit, requiring possible further adjustment of the findings of this thesis.

programmes and aspects of television history that may benefit from further investigation.

However, this thesis also shows that there are consistent themes running through the use of science fiction drama in early British television. These connected to cultural and social concerns of the period, with changes in British society reflected and expressed through connections to television. As the audience for the television service grew, the complexity of its interactions with this audience increased, yet it still connected again and again with these social concerns through its science fiction programming, whether this be worries over government control, or the dehumanisation of society, or the threat and promise of new technology and scientific discoveries. Television science fiction offered opportunities for the BBC television service to experiment with the possibilities of the medium in terms of techniques of narrative, and also to engage with the audience's concerns through those narratives.

Audience, Genre and Taste

The ultimate key to this investigation is the audience, or, rather, the way that the BBC and the television historian have understood the audience. These constructions of the audience develop from surveys, from communications from individuals and groups to the BBC and other bodies and individuals, and from memoirs, in the same way that we have a historical understanding of the audience for cinematic or prose science fiction. The BBC utilised their constructions of the audience to develop an understanding of what would be successful on television, and also to meet the Corporation's requirement to educate and inform as well as entertain. So it was understood that there had to be shifts in programming as a result of the change in the audience profile because of the geographical or social expansion of the television audience. The development of competition in television programming also meant a realignment of production policy to ensure the continued justification of the licence fee funding the BBC service. This production policy also took into account the understanding of the perceived audience response to different types of programmes, including the genre of science fiction, as well as being influenced by the tastes of the production decision makers.

So the increase in science fiction programming towards the middle of the 1950s could have been a response to the perceived decrease in levels of education and taste in the television audience, or a recognition of the growing popularity of the genre in other media, or a preference of production staff for a genre that offers an opportunity to engage with social, political and ethical issues through the lens of the fantastic, or an attempt to recreate the success of particular programmes, such as *The Quatermass Experiment* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Or it could be a mixture of any and all of those, together with other reasons. This thesis recognises that the explanations for the production of individual science fiction programmes are probably related more to the individual production and the needs of the moment rather than to any grand plan, at least from the industrial point of view. However, it also argues that, taken as a whole, science fiction programming on British television, whether known by that label or not, does illustrate broad trends and responses to cultural shifts and concerns, and that it particularly demonstrates the way that the BBC attempted to negotiate its relationship with the popular. It also shows that there was an awareness of similarities between productions within the BBC in this period, and that while these were not entirely genre-based, there was an awareness that programmes could be grouped along genre lines by the audience and that those groupings could affect the response to these productions.

As soon as the BBC Television Service began operation, even as a publicly-funded service it had to be able to demonstrate a certain degree of popularity in order to maintain its call upon the funds provided through the licence fee, as well as its demands on the wider BBC organisation. This helps to explain its initial reliance on adaptations, which allowed the service to connect with audience familiarity with the texts and the reputation of the texts which provided the source for its productions. However, television was also called upon to offer something different, something particularly televisual, in order to differentiate itself from cinema, radio, theatre, and other forms of entertainment. Telefantasy offered an opportunity to experiment with and demonstrate the technological possibilities of the medium, while it also had to comply with the overarching understanding of the demands and tastes of the television audience.

The Future of Television Science Fiction (1956 Onwards)

For the three years following the arrival of ITV, the BBC would only broadcast one science fiction play or serial each year, amounting to a little over eight hours a year, including repeats, for the period 1956 to 1958. In the same period, across the ITV network, over 71 hours of science fiction programming were broadcast. Over the entire period of the BBC monopoly, from 1936 to 1955, approximately 45 hours of television science fiction had been broadcast in Britain.⁵ In 1956 alone, over 34 hours of science fiction programming was broadcast across the ITV network, not counting any repeats or broadcasts of the same production at different times on different regional broadcasters.⁶ Televised science fiction had found its new home, and it was with the new, populist broadcaster rather than the dominant, conservative old guard of the BBC, and it involved brash and exciting American imports, aimed primarily at children.

At least, that is the easy version of the narrative. While the early years of ITV's science fiction broadcasting did contain American imports like *The Adventures of Superman* (Motion Pictures for Television, 1952-1958, first British broadcast 1956) and *Jet Jackson, the Flying Commando* (Screen Gems, 1954-1958, first British broadcast 1959) which were aimed at children, they also included serious single plays and serials aimed at adults. Even on imports alone, it was ITV that would eventually show *One Step Beyond* (ABC Films / Joseph L. Schenk Enterprises, 1959-1961, first British broadcast 1959) and *The Twilight Zone* (Cayuga Productions / CBS, 1959-1964, first British broadcast 1962). Domestic productions were frequently concerned with current issues, such as nuclear warfare, as covered by *Doomsday for Dyson* by J.B. Priestley (Granada, 1958), *The Burning Glass* (Associated-Rediffusion Television, 1956) and *Underground* (ABC Television, 1958). Adaptations continued, whether of classics like *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (ABC Television, 1956) or of more contemporary material, such as the *Nineteen Eighty-*

⁵ This figure includes a repeat performance for all productions except for "Stranger from Space" and uses approximate figures based primarily on programme listings in the *Radio Times*. It includes all productions covered in this thesis broadcast during the monopoly, i.e. *Quatermass II* is not included because it was broadcast after the launch of ITV.

⁶ This information is primarily drawn from the listings in Fulton, Roger, *The Encyclopedia of TV Science Fiction* (London: Boxtree, 2000)

Four-esque One (Associated-Rediffusion Television, 1956), starring Donald Pleasance, who had played Symes in the BBC's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Overall, the picture of science fiction production and broadcast for ITV in the late 1950s was fairly similar to that of the BBC in the mid-1950s. The main differences are in the presence of imported programmes and the volume of production, which is partly explained by the number of franchises and the fact that not all programmes would have received network broadcast.

However, this image of the late 1950s on ITV broadcasting is based on broad information, primarily drawn from Roger Fulton's *Encyclopedia of TV Science Fiction*. As expressed in the introduction to this thesis, this volume and similar reference works are very useful for such overviews, but have their limitations. In particular, they are lacking in contextualisation and analysis, and are prone to reproducing accepted concepts of how genres developed, rather than questioning them. This means that there is still ample work to be conducted, following the development of television science fiction during the initial period of competition, and on into the 1960s, as the BBC returned to science fiction production and brought in imports of its own. Such research could continue the themes of this thesis, in the relationship between genre and notions of taste, and in the relationship between science fiction and contemporary issues such as ideas of individuality and national identity. It could also expand the research into areas unsuited to the early years of British television broadcasting, such as the development of regional specialisation: did one ITV region produce more science fiction than any other, and if so, why and what does this tell us? Another obvious area of exploration would be the question of imported television, how it was received and how it was used; were there any real differences between the broadcasts of *The Adventures of Superman* and the way that the BBC used short Western films during the late 1940s and the 1950s?

There is also more work to be performed in relation to the material covered in this thesis. For example, the analysis of changing gender roles, as examined in relation to the Quatermass serials and *A for Andromeda* by Joy Leman, has barely been considered either in this thesis or in relation to many of the programmes that it deals with. It would also be possible to concentrate more on the development of television technologies, particularly in relation to special effects and spectacle, but

also in consideration of the changing possibilities of production. Comparative analysis of the development of science fiction as a televisual genre with other such genres, such as the Western or television horror, would also be informative, providing further insights into the historical shifts in understanding of and responses to different genres within the context of early British television. As has been clear with some of the productions covered in this thesis, there would be an overlap between programmes considered for a similarly-conducted analysis of early television horror and those considered here.

This thesis has aimed to illuminate some forgotten corners of early British television history, and to show early British television science fiction in its context. As well as the industrial context, the interconnectedness of different media expressions of science fiction and the wider cultures that they were a part of have been examined. There are many ways of continuing these investigations that would provide further insight into the genre of science fiction, the development of British television, and the connections between the two and their contexts. That, however, lies in the future.

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