Reading The League of Gentlemen: study of the creation process of a comedy / horror series

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ABSTRACT

Television production's 'hidden labour' lies concealed behind what we see on our screens. This thesis investigates the creation of *The League of Gentlemen*, a show that is considered a 'special moment in television', unpacking the end product and mapping the critical elements within the show's creation process, to make this 'hidden labour' visible. It examines the *The League's* production ecology to understand how this cultural breakthrough came to be, and contributes to broader discussions about the BBC's broadcasting environment and comedy production in the 1990s.

This thesis is the first study of *The League* that combines a detailed textual analysis with production studies, media history and media anthropology. Through its multi-method approach this study yields new insights into the creation process of *The League*. Through a very detailed analysis, this case study illuminates how the initial idea and the key textual devices (location, character and narrative) developed through various media and creation stages, revealing who and what shaped this process. Through original interviews it gives a voice to various contributors, including the costume designer and the producers, who are often overlooked because of the strong authorial signature of the writers/performers. Therefore, the study sheds light onto some of the 'hidden professions of television' and updates our understanding of the creation process and the final product in the light of these new insights.

The study of *The League's* creation process illustrates that each production is unique and faces different challenges. It reveals that despite major structural and cultural changes at the BBC in the 1990s, which some considered a crisis inimical to creativity, innovation and craftsmanship, there was still room for innovation and creative freedom. The 1990s were not simply a period of crisis in BBC programme making, as some commentators suggested at the time, but an exemplar of how the production ecology was changing. As this study shows, while comedy production is clearly constrained by larger organisational structures and strategies, it also depends crucially on the individuals involved in making comedy, and how they work together. This study highlights that culture production is the sum of all the small moments that happen on the ground - in the corridors of media organisations, in TV studios, during phone conversations - and during the many little decisions made by thinking, feeling and interacting individuals. It is the coming together of these small moments that shape what we see on our screens.

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DECLARATION

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Gamze Toylan

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context & Significance

In his book, *The Making of a Television Series: a case study in the sociology of culture*[1], Elliott (1972) notes that in contrast to an immense preoccupation with the effects of television and artistic output in the field of media studies, investigation of the genesis of television programmes' content is almost non-existent. Respectively, the aim of his study is to "throw light on the relationship between culture and social structure as it is mediated through television" (Elliott 1972: 6) by coupling the production study of a particular programme with analysis of programme content and exploratory audience research. He argues that in order to understand what a text means, how the audiences interpret it or how it influences them, it is essential to examine how the said text came to be. This approach, for Elliott, is the novelty of this study. Although Elliott's research emerged from audience studies, the significance of his work for media organisations and production studies is the acknowledgement of the ontogenesis of a text rather than focusing on one aspect in its 'communication process' (e.g. the broadcast product or audience interpretation).

With regard to research on media institutions and organisations, there is a vast amount of literature that relies solely on wider engagements and determinants to provide a complete account of media organisations, production practices and their outputs (see Cottle 2003: 4–5; Downey 2006: 9; Steemers 2010: 6–7). Similar to an exclusive preoccupation with media output (the final product) that ignores other stages of the creation process, a sole focus on the macro-level analysis causes a 'problem of inference' (Cottle 2003: 5). These positions propose a one-sided view either focusing on ownership, control and power interests or concentrating on broader economic,

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[1]This book is based on Elliott's research that started in 1967.

technological and ideological contexts, with a disregard of the moment of production, including all the other levels of analysis and factors that play significant roles in the complex interrelations between industries, organisations, professionals, texts and audiences (see Cottle 2003; Mittell 2004; Hesmondhalgh 2007; Mayer, Banks et al. 2009; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011; Mittell 2011). The common ground for such theoretical frameworks is the failure to recognise the intricate production ecology combining macro, meso and micro levels, the complexity of media production and the influence of more elusive aspects on production such as the human factor.

Among the studies that acknowledge the complexities in media organisations and production, according to Cottle, there lies "a relatively unexplored and under-theorised 'middle-ground' of organisational structures and workplace practices", which "comprises different organisational fields and institutional settings, and the dynamic practices and daily grind of media professionals and producers engaged in productive processes" (2003: 4). Respectively, the meso level focuses on the planning and strategic decision making stages and refers to the activities of 'creative managers' such as producers (Hesmondhalgh, 2007: 64) who work through the organisational cultures, corporate strategies and editorial policies (Cottle 2003: 23; Steemers 2010: 14–16), while the micro level refers to the everyday working practices of individuals involved in the creation of programmes including their working relationships, the production atmosphere and the cultural milieux. These two levels of media production are crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the complex 'mediations' involved in cultural production (Cottle 2003; Mittell 2004). Messenger-Davies emphasises especially the lack of studies that concentrate on the "people who make television programmes and how these people work" (2006: 21).[2]

Cottle argues that attending to how media professionals "practically manage and 'mediate' a complex of forces (economic, political, regulatory, technological, professional, cultural, normative) that variously facilitate, condition and constrain their forms of media output reveals further levels of insight and understanding" (2003: 4).[3] Similarly, Davis and Scase (2000) point to the primary status of professional practices in understanding media organisations. They criticise the assumptions of exclusive

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[2]See, also Steemers 2010: 6–7, and Corner 1999: 70 for the discussions of the neglect of the field of media production.

[3]For studies on work practices see, for example, Caldwell 2008; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011 and 2008.

macro-analysis, suggesting that it is professional practices that tend to shape the execution of tasks, the definition of organisational roles in relation to specific circumstances and conditions as well as organisational structures and strategies (2000: 13–18).

What we observe then is a progressive acknowledgement of the production spaces and practices hence the micro-level insight for achieving a more comprehensive view of media production and organisations (see Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2008: 98). In his study of a specific television programme Elliott (1972) suggests that the data available here, which refers to "one particular and no doubt individual case[,] [...] can be used to illuminate general features of the television production situation..." (6). Elliot's outlook is developed by other academics such as Mittell (2004 and 2011). Accordingly, Mittell's (2004) cultural approach supports Cottle's (2003) argument, yet takes it one step further. Mittell (2004) argues that a bottom up approach – employed by the discursive practice – that focuses on micro-instances of generic discourses in historically specific moments, develops a more satisfying and complete macro-account. This shows that a discursive bottom up approach demonstrates, for instance, how elements of media texts form and evolve "out of the specific cultural practices of industries and audiences, not out of macro-structures" (Mittell 2004: 175).

Studies that focus on specific programmes such as Millington and Nelson (1986) on *Boys from the Blackstuff* (BBC, 1982), Eaton (2005) on *Our Friends in the North* (BBC2, 1986), Scannell (2003) on *Brains Trust* (BBC, 1941–61), Alvarado and Buscombe (1978) on *Hazell* (ITV, 1978–9), and Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2008) on *Show Us Your Talent* (BBC, 2006–7) are concrete examples of more comprehensive approaches to understanding and reading media texts due to their consideration of the creation processes of the programmes they scrutinise. The invaluable significance of these studies lies in their capacity to reveal the importance of a discursive micro approach. Although not all of them aim for a discursive industrial-cultural approach close up examinations of these works indicate the complexity of any creation process in which many different levels and factors are intertwined.

There are also studies of texts and genres (film and television) such as Hill (1999), Shail (2008), Cooke (2003), Leggott (2008), Lay (2002), Blake (2008) and Luckett (2000) that dedicate a good portion of their analysis to the cultural, political, eco-

nomic and social climate. They reveal that a wider exploration of the context in which a text is created offers us a deeper understanding of its content. These studies illustrate that while texts belong to the contexts they are created in, they also carry their history in them. What they collectively suggest is the significance of studying history (e.g. cultural, industrial, organisational and genre). They highlight that a wider exploration of the contexts in which a text is created affords us a deeper understanding of their content and creation processes.

This study of *The League of Gentlemen* springs from these discussions on the significance of a discursive bottom up approach, which integrates macro, meso and micro level analysis, and the usefulness of combining historical, textual and industrial analysis to understand a specific creation process as well as the wider contexts (e.g. social, cultural and organisational) it is a part of.

1.2   Research Questions

This thesis aims to a) provide a detailed study of the creation of *The League of Gentlemen*[4], unpack the end product and map out the critical elements within the show's creation, b) develop further understanding of the television production ecology in *The League of Gentlemen*, and c) shed light on the more general features of television production in the context of the BBC. The research questions are:

Q1 How did the creation process of *The League of Gentlemen* develop?

The analysis of *The League* attends to the multi-mediality of the show; charts its development from stage to radio to television and film; and explores the elements – both tangible (e.g. organisational structure) and elusive (e.g. production atmosphere) – that influenced this process. It maps out the development of the three intrinsic textual elements of the show – location, character and narrative – through out its creation process; examines their significance and studies the influential factors in their development. Focusing on the television series, it examines the stages of its creation process (writing, commissioning, development, etc.), the people who were

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[4]I refer to both '*The League of Gentlemen*' and 'The League of Gentlemen'. Where italicised it refers to the television programme, and when not it refers to the comedy group. The same holds for '*The League*' and 'The League'.

involved, their roles and professional attitudes. It scrutinises the production atmosphere and the collaboration that took place as well as the individual creative input and the degree of involvement. In terms of the more tangible factors, it investigates its organisational contexts as well as the social and political background.

Q2 How does the television production ecology work within the BBC with particular reference to *The League of Gentlemen* as a case study?

Here, a methodological issue arises in terms of the definition of 'production ecology', which needs to be clarified. Bourdieu's (1993) concepts of 'field' and 'cultural field', his framing of the filed of cultural production that highlights the interconnectedness of various fields, and describes cultural production (with a focus on art and literature) as a system of power relations and struggles among agents and institutions, are influential in developing the concept 'production ecology' (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod et al. 2002; Cottle 2004; Hesmondhalgh 2006; Grenfell 2008). Alvarado and Buscombe (1978) indicate that productions of television programmes do not take place in a vacuum but within highly organised systems of media institutions. Such systems, as Cottle (2003; 2004) and Mittell (2004) argue, works through complex interactions of various factors in macro, meso and micro structures, where "each part of the whole both affects, and is affected by, the other parts" (Alvarado and Buscombe 1978: 4). This research chooses to utilise the term 'ecology' rather than 'system' as the word 'ecology' better reflects two key premises of this research, which are the influence of more elusive aspects on production, such as the human factor, and the precariousness of programme making within complex arrays of interactions. Within the definition of production ecology it is important to note historical changes and determinants. While there is a strong sense of continuity within institutional history, the development of broadcasting system(s) and production ecology(s), there is also a sense of mutation over time as "new people and new ideas percolate through them" (Bertrand and Hughes 2005: 109). Briggs' (1995) work on the history of the BBC and Hendy's (2007) work on the history of Radio Four are good examples that illustrate this change and continuity.

Within the exploration of how the production ecology works for *The League*, the study investigates the creativity/finance (economic concerns and justification of the licence fee) threshold in media production, scrutinises stages of a creation process (writing, commissioning, development, etc.), develops the definitions of professional

roles (channel controller, executive producer, commissioner, producer, writer, director, costume designer, story-board artist, etc.), and questions the creative/executive threshold and creative autonomy. Through the literature review, the fieldwork and the case study of *The League*, it asks which factors are influential in a creation process and how ideas grow and develop in the Corporation, creative processes and stages.

> Q3 How did the "special moments" in television, such as *The League of Gentlemen*, emerge in the BBC during the 1990s, a decade that is considered to be "infertile" by some researchers (e.g. Born 2004)?

This question focuses on the organisational structure and the strategies of the BBC during this period as well as the professional attitudes, and ethos. It examines how creativity was handled within the BBC during the 1990s and the beginning of 2000s. It asks whether the 1990s were a moment of crisis, as suggested at the time, or a moment of change in the way the ecology works. It reviews the role of 'golden ageism' and romanticisation of the past in our perception of the Corporation. This question is answered through the micro analysis of *The League* as well as the examination of the UK broadcasting environment, various creation processes, and the experiences of various professionals, from writers to producers in comedy and drama productions of the BBC, from the 1960s to the noughties, all covered in the literature review (*chapter three* and *four*).

1.3 Research Focus & Frame

In light of the background literature, this study of *The League of Gentlemen* (BBC, 1999–2002) aims for an integrated cultural-industrial-textual examination that incorporates discursive, historical, anthropological, and micro-level analysis.

The study primarily, but not exclusively, deals with the TV incarnation of *The League* and seeks to reconstruct the production of the show's series – its writing, production and reception – in order to evaluate its creative vision, its bearing in the history of the BBC and its significance as a social text, as a product and commentary on British culture and history, by combining textual analysis with production studies approaches.

With textual analysis informed and supported by semi-structured interviews and the study of paratextual elements (secondary sources such as making-of documentaries, DVD commentaries, scripts, and second-hand interviews) the research aims to provide a meaningful and rounded understanding of the text, its creation process and the organisational background. It does so by examining the circumstances it was created in (e.g. industrial, organisational, social, etc.), and how it reflects as well as "contribute(s) images and ideas, discourses and debate for" (Cottle 2003: 4) wider engagements of industrial, organisational, social, political, cultural and economical conduct. The underlying objective of this study is thus to make 'the hidden labour of production' (Scannell 2007: 4) visible and contribute to the wider discussions on reading screen narratives, the nature of TV production and how creativity is handled within the BBC, through an analysis of micro-instances within a specific time period, that is the creation process of *The League*.

1.3.1 *Discursive Practice & the Traditional Text / Process Split*

Although it might be suggested that a work which focuses both on a text and its creation process is ultimately dealing with two different subject matters, as Elliott (1972), Du Gay (1997), Hesmondhalgh (2007) and Mittell (2004) suggest, the story of a text, what we see on the screen, is not an isolated entity but a part of a whole that consists of the birth of the idea, its development through different media, the final product that is broadcast as well as its reception. Indeed, the conceptual framework and the research design of this study hold that the text cannot be detached from its own ontogenesis. Thus the study merges textual analysis with the study of the creation process. The study takes a discursive approach that casts light on a specific historical instance through acknowledging the complexity of creation. It should be noted that although this study considers the reception stage and other relevant issues such as fandom and audience interaction in its analysis, a study of audience practices is beyond its scope.[5]

Therefore the study can be described as a cultural approach[6]

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[5] The study of the reception stage would be a thesis in itself.

[6] Mittell makes use of this approach in his works "A Cultural Approach to Genre Theory" and *Complex TV*, where he scrutinizes genre theory in the former and examines storytelling in the changing climate of American TV, in the latter.

to industrial TV theorising and production practice, which illustrates the inadequacy of the conventional split between analysis of the end product and the creation process for reading a television text and understanding programme making.

Adopting Cottle's (2003) approach, which underlines the necessity for exploring the complexities and continuities of the production process, a key objective of this research is to chart, as it were, the 'biography' of the show: the emergence of the idea, its development and evolution through different media, and the end product. It examines the internal and external factors that impinged on this process, such as the creators' experiences, their inspirations and influences – the internal factors – plus the impact of the television and comedy industry, the BBC as an institution, and key professionals who played important roles in shaping the show (e.g. the producers), as well as the social, cultural, economical and political landscape of Britain at the time of creation. The study, in an integrated fashion, examines the circumstances the show was created in, thus reflecting and analysing the influence of these elements on what we see on our screens. One of the key objectives of the study is to explore how ideas grow and develop in the Corporation, through creation processes and stages. Another key goal is to understand the influential factors in a creation process. The study focuses not only on wider engagements like the economic context and the BBC's organisational structures but also on the micro and more elusive elements such as individual creative input and production atmosphere. In doing so, it aims to explore the relationship between the macro, meso and micro elements within a creation process, how they influence each other, the process and the end product.

1.3.2 *Levels of Analysis*

This approach, then, leads the study towards a multi-level (macro, meso and micro level) analysis. Here time, place and people are intrinsic to the examination. The discursive examination of *The League* calls for a very specific and detailed examination of a given period in history, a specific medium, a specific institution, a specific society, and a specific process. This perspective, combined with the understanding that neither texts nor their production practices are "bounded and stable objects of analysis" (Mittell 2004: 174) offer a dynamism in which the three levels of analysis are examined in an interrelated manner. This approach, as Cottle (2003) notes, is invaluable

for an adequate understanding of the complex nature of today's media industries, organisations and their products. Within this study's multi-sided approach, however, the micro-study takes the leading role and provides the focus. As the research takes into account the wider-engagements of macro and meso level aspects – such as the social, industrial and organizational background – to shed light on a specific programme, in return it aims to bring valuable insight to these wider practices. For example, with the examination of *The League*'s writing, commissioning, development and production stages; the activities of the people who were involved in these stages, their professional relationships and professional conduct within the creation process of the show – supported by the consideration of wider aspects such as the state of the BBC at the time of production – this study seeks to explore and answer *research question two*:

> How does the television production ecology work within the BBC with particular reference to *The League of Gentlemen* as a case study?

Within this question, it explores, the following issues:

> Where does the creativity/finance threshold lie in media production within the BBC?
>
> Where does the creative/executive threshold lie in professional roles within the BBC's organisational structure?
>
> How can we define professional roles such as commissioner, producer, writer and costume designer?

Following Mittell's (2004) argument, the study aims to develop a more satisfying and complete macro-account through a bottom up approach. This approach suggests that micro-accounts and specific practices are key to the metamorphosis of wider structures and engagements. This view pushes back the arguments that establish macro elements, such as organisational structures, have complete and one-way influence on micro aspects such as individual creative input. It is in this study these arguments are tested and challenged with concrete examples.

It is necessary to clarify the challenges that a bottom up approach faces. A cultural approach establishes that that each production is a distinct phenomenon. Making generalisation based on the analysis of one specific programme is tricky, and can po-

tentially lead to inadequate conclusions. To address this risk, it is crucial to draw out the common and routine as well as the unorthodox and extra-ordinary by introducing a wider scope to the study without losing its focus. The framing of this thesis, by supplementing its micro-study with macro and meso level insight – which includes an examination of the UK broadcasting environment in the context of the BBC within a wide time period, several other shows and accounts from a wide range of professionals – aims to avoid overgeneralisations and provide it with an informed framework. The research acknowledges the uniqueness of each production. Yet, it aims to establish the peculiarities within *The League* as well as the common themes, practices and approaches in programme making within the BBC.

1.3.3 *Historical Approach: State of the BBC*

Consequently, through this bottom-up approach the study aims to provide valuable insight in to the state of the BBC between the end of nineties and the beginning of the noughties. Many studies (for instance, Wegg-Prosser 2001; Born 2004; Hendy 2007) suggest that in the 1990s the BBC was going through major structural and cultural changes especially with Jon Birt's (BBC Director General 1993–2000) resource management initiatives and administrative practices. If we look at the accounts that focus on the experiences of professionals (e.g. writers and producers) who pursue their jobs within the 'new' Corporation, what seem to mark this period are the decline of artistic aspiration, increased corporatism and the advance of market forces. For instance, Born (2004) and Day-Lewis' (1998) interviews with media professionals highlight that these professionals were engaged in a struggle for survival among the shifting broadcasting climate as the creative working atmosphere together with the 'quality' programming was seen to be in decline. In these spoken-thoughts what we also observe is a glorification of the past, and talk of a so-called 'golden age'. While it is rather hard to look back at the times of 'Birtism' with a sense of glorification, it is interesting to explore whether the romantisisation of the past still exists when looking back to the 1990s' organisational atmosphere from today's perspective. The significant element here is how the perceptions of many professionals working during the 'dark ages' seem to be softening in their more current interviews where they compare the said period to current climate (see Day-Lewis 1998; Bleasdale, Walters

et al. 2011). Respectively, a key question (*research question three*) for this study is: Were the 1990s a moment of crisis, as suggested at the time, or did it represent a change in the way the ecology works?[7]

This framing invites us to consider a significant issue. If this period saw a vast constraint on creativity as many argued, then we should not be able to observe a breakthrough like *The League*[8] coming into being. This leads to another key question: How did the "special moments" in television manage to emerge during these apparently infertile years (*research question three*)?

The design of this research, which is centred around the close-up examination of *The League*'s creation process – the birth of the idea, development within the industry to its screen presence – allows for and invites reflection on key issues on the nature of TV production, the production ecology, the division of creativity and finance, influential factors in a creation process, understanding of creative autonomy, professional roles, attitudes and practices in media production, working relationships, collaboration, individual creative input, working conditions and atmosphere, the creative/executive threshold, as well as the BBC's organisational structure, strategy and ethos from the 1990s to the beginning of the 2000s.

1.3.4 *Anthropological Approach*

Highlighting the collaborative nature of television production – which has been acknowledged in works such as Ellis (2004), Tunstall (1993), Hesmondhalgh (2007), Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) as well as Millington and Nelson (1986) – the study approaches culture production as the sum of all the small moments that happen on the ground – in the corridors of media organisations, in the TV studios, during phone conversations – and during the many little decisions made by thinking, feeling and interacting individuals (Hendy 2013: 70). The study, with an anthropological approach, recreates the show's production process by drawing information from original interviews with professionals who were involved in the creation of *The*

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[7]Such a query demands an analysis that reconstructs the considered time period while retaining a certain distance from it, which this study does.

[8]*The League* is widely acknowledged as a TV breakthrough. Having it's own book within the BFI TV Classics' series is a strong testament to its status.

League such as Jemma Rodgers (producer), Jon Plowman (executive producer), Steve Pemberton (writer/performer), Yves Barre (costume designer) and Mike Nicholson (storyboard artist) as well as secondary sources such as DVD commentaries and behind the scenes documentaries.

In the light of such insight, the study argues that TV production and creation within the BBC are neither heavily standardised, machine like systems of production, nor series of unaccountable and ambiguous instants. Although there is a system within a production process this cannot be defined simply by a "production line" metaphor nor should it be explained through a man against the system/organisation approach. The close-up examination in this research illustrates that programme making within the Corporation is not a linear process but something organic – an ecological and social environment. The research delineates and analyses how this ecology works. With a discursive bottom up approach, it underlines the precariousness of programme making, and establishes the significance of the human factor and what we may call the elusive elements in the complex array of interactions.

1.4   Chapter Outline & Structure of the Thesis

The second chapter outlines the methodology and explains the various choices that were made. It expands on the choice of semi-structured interviews supported by secondary sources and textual analysis. It discusses the reasons behind the choice of interviewees and why they are deemed to produce valuable insight. It explains the extent of the grey literature that was covered, how the information was employed and how this benefited the study. It discusses the idea behind integrated cultural-industrial analysis and discursive practice; reflects on the use of the bottom up approach; scrutinises the issue of specificity and generality; and clarifies the way media anthropology was adopted in this thesis.

The third and fourth chapters introduce the contextual and theoretical background of the study that focuses on Britain and television comedy-drama at the end of the 20th Century. These two chapters establish the strong connection between texts, their creation processes and contexts (social, political, cultural, organisational, industrial, etc.). They set the scene for the analysis of *The League*. They introduce the historical

information on the social, cultural, political, economic, organisational and industrial contexts, as well as the theoretical concepts on social texts, genres and creation processes necessary for the analysis. Historical explorations in the literature review focus on the following aspects:

- Social, cultural, political and economical state of Britain (*chapter three*)

- National styles of comedy, drama, horror and gothic genres (*chapter three*)

- UK broadcasting industry (*chapter four*)

- BBC's organisational history, and comedy and drama output (*chapter four*)

They collectively help us pinpoint what *The League* means and why it is what it is.

They are useful in understanding the show's content – the themes and images it represents (textual analysis) – as well as its creation process.

The third chapter "Social Texts" is divided into two sub-chapters – "Britain on Screen since 1970" and "Genre: Horror and Comedy" to set the scene for *The League of Gentlemen*. The chapter begins with a chronological outlook, and establishes the strong connection between texts and the contexts they are created in. It examines the changes as well as the continuities that can be observed through time in Britain as well as film and television texts. It reflects on the fact that a text not only carries elements of the existent context that it was created in but also elements from the past such as long-running social traditions and traditional genre features – e.g. the English comedy tradition. This historical exploration signifies the necessity to analyse a text in a wider cultural context. The chapter also illustrates a text's- whether it is drama, comedy, horror, sci-fi, or a genre hybrid – ability to reflect as well contribute to wider engagements of social, cultural, political and economic context. It demonstrates these key arguments by analysing specific examples from film and television. It explores the evolution and features of British social realist drama, English comedy, and English gothic traditions, as these genres permeate *The League*.

Chapter four, "Processes" is comprised of three sub-chapters: "TV Industry and Production since 1970", "Production of Culture / Cultures of Production" and "The Production Context and *The League of Gentlemen*". While the "Social Texts" forms the connection between texts and the contexts they flourish in, "Processes" establishes the link between contexts, texts, and creation processes, completing the con-

ceptual framework that guides this research. Following the discussion of the portrayal of Britain on screen from the late 1970s throughout the 1990s, "TV Industry and Production since 1970" traces the changes in the TV industry itself as well as the impacts of these changes on the output. Structured chronologically, it explores the state of the TV industry with a focus on the BBC in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. It observes how the changes in the political and economic circumstances during this period forged shifts within the BBC, which, in turn, influenced the creation processes. What this section allows us to see is that the changing political, social and economical context does not only influence the content of TV comedy and drama texts but also plays a pivotal role in the media organisations, production processes and practices that they are created in. Supporting this sub-chapter, "Production of Culture / Cultures of Production" explores the academic literature, which underlines the limitations of the culture/creativity and commerce/economic split, acknowledging the complex and ambivalent relationship between the creators, the industries and the texts, as well as establishing creative organisations as platforms of negotiation, conflict, and compromise. Through examples from productions that are considered breakthroughs, abstract ideas about the production of culture and cultures of production are translated into concrete examples, helping to identify the limitations and strengths of proposed theories. The historical context is intrinsic for understanding and questioning perceptions of the BBC's broadcasting environment and the way the production ecology works. Lastly in this chapter, "The Production Context and *The League of Gentlemen*" acts as a link between the conceptual framework and the rest of this thesis – the methodology and the empirical chapters. It provides the underlying context of the case at hand.

The next four chapters cover the examination and analysis of empirical findings on *The League of Gentlemen*. Here, the first three analysis chapters are structured through key textual devices in screen studies: location, character and narrative. In *chapters five, six and seven* these three textual devices are respectively analysed in an interrelated fashion with the creation process drawing information from original interviews, secondary sources and detailed textual analysis. The analysis shows how on-screen representations were influenced by off-screen elements and stages. The examples that are examined showcase the precariousness of production. Accordingly, programme making is constituted by numerous, complex elements such as economic

concerns, ethos, serendipity, taste, organisational conditions, nature of a medium, channel tone, production conditions and artistic vision. Here, while we observe the influence of the wider context, such as organisational strategies, the study highlights the significance of more elusive elements for understanding media texts, programme making and media organisations. It establishes the non-linear nature of programme making and signifies that creation emerges within an organic infrastructure. The examples and issues that are discussed illustrate that in such an infrastructure it is the elusive elements and specific people involved in the making of these shows, during the time considered, that are the key factors.

Chapter eight, on the production ecology, deepens our understanding of the underlining themes – the production ecology and the significance of the human factor within this ecosystem that run through the analysis of the first three empirical chapters. It focuses on the BBC's organisational structure, ethos, professional roles, individual practices, working relationships, creativity threshold within the structure, and the issue of creative autonomy using *The League of Gentlemen* as a reference point.

The ninth and final chapter concludes this study. It provides a summary of the theoretical argument and the empirical findings. It reflects on the results and considers their relevance, significance and the implications of the study for the field of media studies. It also reflects on some of the theoretical and methodological limitations of the study and proposes promising areas for future research.

1.5   Conclusion

This study is designed to investigate the nature of TV production and how the production ecology works within the BBC focusing on a case study. Through a discursive micro-level analysis that offers concrete examples, it challenges and tests the existing theories on media organisation, production practices and media texts. On a deeper level, the study sheds light on important aspects such as the stages of creation processes, professional roles, and their relationships with cultural, economical and industrial contexts. It questions and challenges long-running discussions about the cultural and creative industries, creative autonomy, the creativity- commerce split,

and the dominance of organisation versus the individual creative worker. Or, in other words, the 'hidden labour of production' (Scannell 2007: 2–3; Hendy 2013: 70) through its meso and micro level insights that are essential contributions to the field of media organisations and production research.

METHODOLOGY

Following *chapter one*, which set out the research focus, frame and structure and posed the principal research questions, this chapter sets out the methodological choices and processes of this study. It first outlines the main elements of and rationale for the methodology in relation to the study's overall research design. It draws out the methodological issues that arise, and clarifies the historical and anthropological approach this study takes. Secondly, it charts out the different methodological components: paratextual network analysis, interviews and textual/moving image analysis. It reflects on the significance and appropriateness of these components for the research goals, and explains how the study aims to resolve the limitations of the choices made.

2.1 Aims, Methods & Research Questions

Alvarado and Buscombe (1978) suggest that, "... what television most requires is a kind of criticism which is concerned above all with understanding, with trying to find out how television works, what it means and why it is what it is" (3). Seaton (2004) notes, "Programmes are like icebergs – what you see is a fraction of what goes into making them, and sometimes the thought is more important than the programmes themselves" (157). Writers such as Cottle (2003), Mittell (2004), and Caldwell (2008) collectively point towards some of the scholarly traps in media organisations and production studies: one, complete focus on macro level analysis (e.g. economic analysis), two, 'direct' analysis of a social group within an industry (in media ethnography), and, three, limiting examination to on-screen forms. They argue that these approaches, when utilised individually, produce examinations inadequate for understanding media production. Respectively, this study focusing on *The League of Gen-*

tlemen and its incarnations avoids such pitfalls with a discursive approach led by a micro-level analysis that integrates cultural, historical, anthropological, industrial and textual examination. Through this approach, on the one hand, it aims to understand the creation process of *The League of Gentlemen* and chart out the significant factors in this process (*research question one*), and on the other, contribute to a better understanding of how television programmes are made in particular contexts (*research question two and three*) – e.g. organisational (the BBC), time period (end of nineties and beginning of noughties), British comedy and cult shows – which help illuminate general features of television production (see, Elliott 1972; Cottle 2003; Mittell 2004). Accordingly, the research questions this study tackles are:

Q1 How did the creation process of *The League of Gentlemen* develop?

Q2 How does the television production ecology work within the BBC with particular reference to *The League of Gentlemen* as a case study?

Q3 How did the "special moments" in television, such as *The League of Gentlemen* emerge in the BBC during the 1990s, a decade that is considered to be "infertile" by some researchers (e.g. Born 2004)?

The integrated approach of the study draws on a range of data and kinds of analysis. As Caldwell (2008) explains in order to have a better understanding of film/television industries, production communities and their on-screen products, "media studies must avoid limiting research to a clean menu of methods" (3). The methods utilised in this study are as follows: Industrial analysis, historical analysis, textual analysis, study of the paratextual networks surrounding the primary texts (both privately exchanged amongst the production crew and professional gatherings – e.g. scripts, and production notes – and public disclosures – e.g. DVD bonus materials, academic and promotional publications) as well as original interviews. As Hansen, Cottle et al. (1998) note, "… good research usually benefits from the use of a combination of methods" (1); and explain that, "The aim should always be to choose those methods, or combination of methods, which can light up the most angles and dimensions of what are invariably multidimensional and complex processes and phenomena" (1–2). The key here is to provide what Caldwell (2008) calls a "synthetic" approach where data from various registers and modes of analysis are gathered and kept "in check" by placing the discourses and results of any one register (e.g. textual, para-

textual, interviews, and economic/industrial analysis) in critical tension or dialogue with others. Using a combination of methods and cross-checking form the basis of this research's methodology, which aims to overcome limitations that may arise with the application of any single technique

Television programmes are not made within a vacuum but within a highly organised system in which a complex array of forces are at work (Alvarado and Buscombe 1978: 3). For example, Alvarado and Buscombe (1978) in their study of the production process of *Hazell* (ITV, 1978–9) try to identify some of these forces within the system in which television programmes are made, and point towards the influence of people as well as larger structures. This indicates the significance of a discursive approach to understand specific creation processes. The study of *The League* takes this approach on board as it integrates macro, meso and micro levels of analysis, which examine wider cultural, industrial, economical and political contexts; as well as the middle ground of production where these macro and micro engagements are mediated via creative managers, everyday working practices, and the artistic, cultural and professional approaches of individuals (see Cottle 2003; Steemers 2010). Similarly Caldwell (2008) argues that while media texts "are influenced by macroscopic economic processes, they also very much function on a microsocial level as local cultures and social communities in their own right" (2); and adds:

> Film and television [...] do not simply produce mass or popular culture (a much-studied perspective for over seven decades), but rather film/TV production communities themselves are cultural expressions and entities involving all of the symbolic processes and collective practices that other cultures use: to gain and reinforce identity, forge consensus and order, to perpetuate themselves and their interests, and to interpret the media as audience members. (2)

Caldwell points towards the significance of meso and micro-level analysis for understanding media texts and their productions. His quote indicates a view familiar in adaptation studies, where each production is seen as a non-linear process of adaptation involving critical and creative input by the individuals involved in this process (Babbage, Jones et al. 2010; Chapple 2010). This reinforces the arguments put forward by Cottle (2003) and Davis and Scase (2000) for acknowledging how media professionals operate within an institutionalised structure of production processes

as mediators between a wider set of determinants. These points support Mittell's (2004) argument that a bottom up approach can illuminate wider contexts. Accordingly, the discursive examination in this study is led by micro-level analysis to provide insight into the larger concepts discussed in *research question two* and *three*:

> How does the television production ecology work within the BBC with particular reference to *The League of Gentlemen* as a case study?

> How did the "special moments" in television, such as *The League of Gentlemen*, emerge in the BBC during the 1990s, a decade that is considered to be "infertile" by some researchers (e.g. Born 2004)?

This leads to questions about issues such as: the creativity/commerce threshold in media production within the BBC, the creative/executive threshold in professional roles within the BBC's organisational structure, and the definition of professional roles such as commissioner, producer, writer and costume designer.

Through the discursive examination of a particular creation process, the study aims to identify the constants and the variables within this creation process; establish what makes the show in question typical and what makes it extraordinary (see Seaton 2004: 156). This leads us to the issue of specificity. The amount of detail that this particular study makes possible has its own value, based on the specificity of each production. However, it is limited in terms of developing the larger picture. The problem of this limited view, resulting from the focus on a single creation process (the evolution of *The League*), is addressed through the literature review and original interviews. The research also considers various other shows' creation processes in order to provide this specific study with a wider context. Other shows were chosen for comparison on the basis of: the time periods they were created in, their 'cult' status, the people who worked on them and the organisation they were created within/for.

While one of the aims of this study is to provide an insight into the larger system, this study also acknowledges that this system is constantly changing through time, and that different variations takes place in each creation process. A bottom up approach holds that the specificity of each production process largely rests with the human factor in production processes, and the mediation between tangible and elusive elements. For example, *The League* would have been a different programme if it

was made in a different time period, within a different organisation and by different people. This follows Scannell's (2013) argument that production of TV programmes is 'saturated by human intentionality', which he describes as 'the invisible care structure of production processes'. The aim of this thesis is then to explore a specific production process – while considering the larger picture and other production processes to avoid making undue generalisations – and make the invisible factors (macro, meso and micro) within this specific production care structure visible.

2.1.1 *Methodological Issues: The Scope of a Historical Approach & Media Anthropology*

Two methodological issues that arise here are the scope of the historical approach and media anthropology, which need to be clarified. The historical approach taken by this study can be illustrated through both literary and anthropological analysis. As Genette (1982; 1997) illustrates, texts do not only belong to a particular literary practice of the moment they are created in, but belong to the bigger literary figuration. Similarly, the culture of people not only belongs to a particular historical moment and political economy – in other words interlocking contexts of a particular moment – (see Mankekar 1999) but it is a continuous part of a socio-economic-political-cultural continuum (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod et al. 2002). The conceptual framework of this study (the literature review as well as the analysis chapters) is structured with such perspectives in mind. For example, it examines the continuums and changes within British culture and politics, the BBC as an institution (structure, strategies and culture) and their connections from the 1970s until the 2000s; similarly, it observes the changes and the continuations in contemporary British horror and comedy genres (see *Chapter three* and *Chapter four*). This perspective is influential in all three main research questions. It is especially useful for *research question three* that is interested in the passing of time and the changes it brings not only to factual content (e.g. organisational strategies and working conditions) but people's perceptions of such elements, which are directly correlated with the understanding of the BBC's production ecology in the 1990s.

Marwick (1993) points to another important feature of historical research, "historians do not set out to know everything: they address specific, limited, clearly defined questions or topics" (120). Marwick (1993) adds that specific organising principles

form the base of a historical study. In this study the organising principles are a specific time period (the end of nineties and the beginning of noughties), a specific organisation (the BBC), and a specific television show (*The League of Gentlemen*). While the study is organised around these principles, it also recognises the wider picture as mentioned above.

The anthropological approach this thesis takes is not a traditional one, but more informed by the "multi-sited" approach of George E. Marcus and the "interpretive" anthropology of Clifford Geertzs. The strategies and methods drive this study follow Coman and Rothenbuhler's (2005) argument that "media anthropology expands rhetoric of classical ethnography" (2).

In his multi-sited analysis Marcus (1998: 4) argues for the need to juxtapose multiple ethnographically conceived sites. Marcus (1998) suggests that in order to develop sophisticated strategies for understanding culture it is crucial to merge local and global narratives. This perspective, on the one hand, points towards the tendency for "the fiction of the whole" (macro systems) to exercise powerful control over the narrative in which an ethnographer frames a local world (micro system); and signifies the problematic nature of such inclination (Marcus 1998: 33). On the other hand, it highlights another framing rhetoric of ethnography, "the macro-micro dichotomy", and suggests that this seriously limits ethnography's possibilities and applications (Marcus 1998: 35). Marcus' (1986; 1998) outlook takes us to the bifocal anthropological work on media studies that attend to both the institutional structures and the agency and circumstances of cultural producers (Dornfeld 2002; Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod et al. 2002; Cottle 2003; Mittell 2004; Caldwell 2008). Following this tradition, the multi-sited spaces in this research coincide with macro, meso and micro locales in which the production ecology evolves.

Marcus' works follow Paul Willis' (1981) research in *Learning to Labour* as a significant example of such macro-micro structured ethnographies. Willis' work is interesting as it offers a kind of a "ground up" approach that reveals how macro determinants are reshaped as they pass though the cultural milieu, the "realm of the human and cultural" (1981: 22); which we observe in the works of Caldwell (2008), Mittell (2004), and Davis and Scase (2000). This study takes the multi-sited approach of Marcus and develops it with a "multi-theorised" approach to media studies by moving beyond the standard split between film/television "theory" and film/television

"work," by integrating considerations of production, textuality, and reception (Dornfeld 2002; Caldwell 2008).

Geertz's interpretative anthropology is highly useful, too. For Geertz analysis of cultural forms can be done in a similar manner to examining a literary text (1991: 266). Interpretative anthropology examines "culture as an assemblage of texts," and acknowledges cultural forms/texts "as imaginative works built out of social materials" (266). Thus, Geertz argues, "The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong" (269). As Orther describes, Geertz recognised "culture" as "webs of meaning" within which people live, where meaning is encoded in symbolic forms (language, artifacts, etiquette, rituals, calendars, and so on) that must be understood through acts of interpretation (1999: 3).

Geertz's interpretative approach to ethnography opens new doors for media anthropology and media production studies – particularly in the context of textual and paratextual analysis. It is especially significant here as this is a study of a creation process that happened in the past. Since it is impossible to go back in time and examine the process as it rolls out, Geertz's approach opens up the possibility of reconstructing this period in time via the texts it produced. This study, then, examines the production culture of the BBC and the production community of *The League of Gentlemen*, in the context of the creation process of *The League* by treating this production culture(s) as an ensemble of texts. In line with Caldwell's (2008) study, it explores the texts (artifacts, rituals, professional styles, production atmosphere, etc.) that belong to the production community behind *The League*. Therefore, by taking collectively sustained symbolic structures within the production ecology of *The League* (such as communication between the writers and the costume designer, costume fittings, meetings with executives, recce for location, studio filming, video diaries of the writing process, DVD commentaries and so on), the study puts together these "webs of meaning," and aims to understand the culture they belong to.

Although this approach provides an unconventional anthropological study, Rothenbuhler and Coman (2005) argue that as long as the ethnographic goals are achieved by the interpretative accounts, "the research activity is itself legitimately ethnographic – whether or not it fulfils all the requirements of the classical ethnographic field experience" (3). The authors note, "Valuable interpretive accounts can be based on

relatively small periods of observation, focusing on media texts as much as people and activities" (3). Rothenbuhler and Coman (2005: 3) reflect on how analysis that focuses on reconstruction via interpretation can provide new insights about the media, and move 'classical' assumptions in media studies and media ethnography into new light. This demonstrates that the reconstruction of the creation process of *The League* can produce valuable insight on its specific production ecology, as well as the BBC and the broadcasting environment in the UK in the 1990s more generally. The next sections explain in detail the methods and strategies employed by this study.

2.2 Surrounding Paratextual Networks & Grey-Literature

This section explains the term paratext (as well as paratextual surround or surrounding paratextual networks) and why it is useful for this study. It explores the paratexts used for this study of *The League of Gentlemen*.

The term *paratext* emerges from Genette's work in contemporary literary theory. In *Paratexts: Thresholds of interpretation* (first published in French in 1987) the author explores the literary and printerly conventions that mediate between the world of publishing and the world of the text. Although Genette focuses on books only within the study of texts, his work is highly adaptable to film and television (see Gray 2010; Ramsay 2013).

According to Genette's description, paratexts are the elements (devices and conventions) that surround and contextualise a text (in this case a book), which can both exist within the text (what the author calls *peritext*) and outside it (what the author calls *epitexts*) (see Macksey 1997). The peritexts, the 'framing elements' that are within or around the text, include elements such as titles, subtitles, forewords and dedications. The epitexts, the more 'distanced' elements located outside the text and exist in the public and private history of the text, can be divided into two sections: "public epitexts" such as interviews and "private epitexts" such as authorial correspondence, oral confidences, and diaries. As Genette (1997) notes, "... peritext and epitext completely and entirely share the spatial field of paratext" (5). This definition contains paratextual elements that can appear at any time – prior (e.g. trailers and press packs), at the same time or posterior to the public consumption and/or

availability of a text. In the more recent literature Genette's (1997) concept of para-texts has mostly been translated for film and television studies as elements outside or around texts – e.g. promos, DVD bonus materials, by-products such as spin-offs, games and other merchandise, posters, viewer created paratexts, and so on (see Gray 2010; Ramsay 2013). This we may call the surrounding paratextual networks.

With this concept in mind, it is argued that just as the programme and episode titles (peritexts); reviews, interviews, DVD commentaries, scripts, production notes, related publications and diaries (epitexts) do influence narrative conventions and diegetic progress of a text. Thus, the large amount of material that accumulates within and around any mediated text – what Gray (2010) calls text's proliferations – each has the capacity to influence the meaning of a text – even if only slightly – or suggest new meanings. Ramsay (2013) describes paratextual networks as an "intricate array of material that infuse the original texts" (9). Caldwell (2008) argues for a view that the paratexts created by the communities who produced the original text – e.g. 'making of' documentaries, DVD bonus tracks, etc. – are self-reflexive devices of those communities, and thus important factors of research in understanding the structures of those communities and their creations. This links us to Geertz's (1991; 2000) interpretative anthropology. Using this framework, Caldwell (2008) argues that paratexts such as DVD extras, 'making-ofs', behind-the-scenes docs and marketing dimensions are all elements of industrial reflexivity which need "to be understood as forms of local cultural negotiation and expression" belonging to the production communities that create these works (2008: 2). This, then, explains the significance of studying such works for understanding these production communities – e.g. cultural milieu, working dynamics, production atmosphere, personal input and style. Such an approach to paratext is especially helpful in exploring *research question one* and *two*, which focus on the creative process of *The League*, its various incarnations, as well as its production ecology.

Similar to Genette (1997), who points out the complex mediations between, author, publisher and audience in his analysis, Gray (2010) and Ramsay (2013), in their individual research on paratextual networks, argue for the interplay between production, distribution, promotion and reception. This echoes Mittell's (2004) cultural approach and reflects a) the interconnection between texts, contexts, industries and audiences; and b) paratexts' value in developing our understanding and research on

texts' creation processes (not only how paratexts may influence our reading of a text, but also how they may offer more insight into its conception and production).

The conceptual framing of this study adopts this perspective and combines the study of the content (textual analysis) with the study of paratextual networks that surround the studied texts. The study of the paratextual surround helps a) to gain more insight about the production or the conception of *The League* and its incarnations, b) to support the textual analysis, and c) to prepare for the interviews. For this specific study, the analysis of the texts (the radio show, the television show, the film and the stage shows) and the paratextual networks surrounding these texts are very helpful in developing the conceptual framework of this research (explored in *chapter three* and *chapter four*), forming the structure of this thesis as well as preparing for the semi-structured interviews.

2.2.1 *Paratextual Networks & The League of Gentlemen*

The League of Gentlemen[1], and especially their TV incarnation, has a rich paratextual surrounding. The writers/performers of the show are very open about their work and shared their thoughts and experiences in many platforms including broadcast interviews (e.g. *In Conversation with The League of Gentlemen* and *Desert Island Discs* broadcast on Radio 4), interviews with the press (e.g. *Radio Times*, *Broadcast*, *Shivers*, *Sight and Sound*), DVD extras (e.g. 'making of' documentaries, DVD commentaries and writing logs), various publications including their scripts (*Scripts and That*), a complimentary book providing background information about the fictional town in which the series is based and its inhabitants (the pretend diary of one of the characters in the series, *A Local Book for Local People*), as well as *The Book of Precious Things* where the writers individually talk about the inspirations behind their creations. The writers also appeared in live talks where they discuss their works (e.g. *In Conversation with Mark Gatiss* and *In Conversation with Steve Pemberton* at the National Theatre). While the BBC's own press packs for *The League* are available on the BBC webpage, there are also various fan websites dedicated to the comedy team.

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[1]I refer to the writer/performer team.

In terms of the academic literature, Hunt's (2008) book *The League of Gentlemen (BFI Classics)*, which analyses different aspects of the television show, and Hutchings' (2004) article "Uncanny Landscapes in British Film and Television", which explores the representation of location in *The League,* among other texts, provide interesting observations. Hunt and Hutchings deploy a cinematic approach and limit their analysis (concentrating on the horror genre) to textual understanding. Consequently, while the writers give us their interpretations of the show or various aspects of it, they leave out why and how it came to be. Hunt's and Hutchings' scholarly observations provide a valuable starting point in drawing out the key themes for the structure of the conceptual framework and the analysis chapters of this thesis, yet it is important to note that they provide only very limited insight into the creation process. The information about the creation processes provided in the other paratexts (e.g. writers' interviews and books) helps develop a more rounded understanding of the show and provides insight into its conception, production and reception processes. Ergo, thorough research of relevant press cuttings was conducted at the British Film Institute's National Archive. The BFI online search facility revealed fifteen items from ten different periodicals including *Radio Times*, *Sight and Sound*, *TV Zone*, *Empire* and *Broadcast.* A wider online search, using keywords such as the titles of the shows as well as the names of the contributors, was also conducted for online press reviews and interviews.

In these surrounding paratextual networks, what we observe is a tendency towards the romanticisation of the 'authors' and a certain level of neglect towards the collaborative nature of production. These paratexts are dominated by the writer/performers of the show. The perspectives and views of other collaborators' are only reflected in very few instances – in the DVD extras there are two short interviews, one with the music composer and the other with the costume designer. Therefore, while the paratextual networks are useful for charting the creative processes of *The League*, they, nevertheless, lack diversity. A limitation, which can be overcome through the use of original interviews conducted with a diverse range of professionals. Unfortunately, researching the BBC Archive was not possible, as the time period the thesis deals with falls outside the period (before 1st January 1980) for which the BBC's Written Archives Centre has released production paperwork. However, the rich paratextual surrounding and the original interviews help overcome this limitation.

2.3 Interviews

The interview is one of the most commonly used and fundamental methods of data collection in social science research (Hyman, Cobb et al. 1975; Briggs 1986; Holstein and Gubrium 1997; Berger 2000). Pointing towards the significance of oral history in the study of media organisations, Seaton (2004) notes, "... you do broadcasting history just like any other kind, by talking with individuals and getting groups together" (154). This technique, as others, has its advantages and limitations. The key issues that arise are reliability and interpretation.

Berger (2000) suggests that interviews enable researchers to obtain first hand information that they cannot gain by observation alone. As he explains, "observation does give us a sense of context, which often helps explain what people do. But it doesn't help us get inside people to understand why they do things, what motivates them, and what anxieties they have" (113). Thus, researchers can obtain knowledge about the past and the present, about people's attitudes and motivations through interviews. Similarly Seaton (2004) explains, "Interviews animate the files, explain the real story and give you a flavour of the people and their concerns" (155). Although this study does not produce an ethnographic research in a classical sense (no observation), the information about the production process obtained at the time of production is gathered through surrounding paratextual networks – the well-documented (recorded and written) creation process. Here, oral history is complimentary, allowing the research to develop a rounded analysis.

Focusing on the issue of reliability in oral history, Berger (2000) notes:

> ... the information gained is always suspect. So one must proceed with caution when generalizing from interviews, but they are unique in allowing researchers to get inside the minds of people and to gain access to material of considerable importance. Like many high-risk activities, they are also high-gain ones. (125)

The main issues here are: a) the fallibility of memory, b) biased opinions, c) influence of time on thoughts and feelings, and, d) interpretation. However, these are all issues that can be resolved. For example, Richie (2003) indicates that people's memories tend to become more nostalgic due to the dissatisfaction of the present

situations which make the past look far better, yet adds, "[i]t is the oral historian's task to move the interview away from nostalgia to confront the past candidly and critically" (35). Richie (2003) and Caldwell (2008) point towards a potential drawback of doing corporate oral history where higher level executive personnel might be more biased or provide pre-structured answers, where as lower administrative or non-administrative staff (in media organisations, for example, primary creative personnel, technical workers, and creative managers) might provide a clearer, less biased view. Respectively, Seaton (2004) notes, "In a history as heated as the BBC everyone has a story" (154), demonstrating the importance of talking with a range of people from various professional roles. Born (2004: 17) indicates that interviewing numerous people across a media organisation can allow researchers to piece together the larger picture or at least provide an integrated account. Similarly the disappointments due to faded memory can be balanced by conducting interviews with a large number of people and by interviewees who possess remarkable recall. Similar to Born and Seaton's approaches, this research utilises first-hand interviews with a range of professionals from various roles (e.g. channel controller, commissioner, producer, writer, costume designer and storyboard artist) in order to provide a clearer view of the creation process of *The League of Gentlemen*, the production ecology of the BBC in the context of *The League* as well as the more general features of programme making in the context of the BBC. What is original is that these interviews introduce the voices of those people who were neglected from the history of *The League* by the surrounding paratextual networks. As *The League* has been highly branded by the authorial signature of its writer/performers, the experiences, thoughts and the contributions of the professionals who collaborated on the creation of the show (such as the executive producer, producer, costume designer and so on) were not explored. A key contribution of this research then is to bring these other contributors' thoughts and perspectives to light; and analyse the final text as well as its creation process in the light of the new information that interviews provide.

Berger (2000) describes four types of interviews: informal, unstructured, semi-structured and structured. For this research semi-structured interviews were deemed appropriate. According to Berger, "... the interviewer usually has a written list of questions to ask the informant but tries, to the extent possible, to maintain the casual quality found in unstructured interviews" (2000: 112). Developing a semi-structured

interview begins with in depth preparation – research on the topic of interview and the interviewee. Then a list of key questions and follow up questions is drawn up. The follow up questions are used if more time remains after the key questions. Semi-structured interviews can achieve two major things: active interviewing and guidance.

In terms of active interviewing, Richie (2003) explains, "Regardless of the project's worthy objectives, a good oral history will always leave room for interviewees to speak their own minds, and will not try to shoehorn their responses into a prepared questionnaire or mind-set" (32). This points towards the unexpected and useful information that an interviewee may provide within a less-structured setting. Richie (2003) also notes that successful interviewers can guide interviewees into areas that concern the researcher, which the interviewees might never have thought of discussing otherwise. This, in the case of this study, is achieved through preparation and research before the interview. Similarly the disappointments due to faded memory can also be balanced by the knowledge of the interviewer, which was the case for the Jon Plowman interview (see appendix). The knowledge of the interviewer (due to preparation) also develops a relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee based on confidence and trust. It deepens the conversations and encourages the interviewee to open up. These points fall into what Holstein and Gubrium (1997) describe as active interviewing, where one can "acknowledge, and capitalize upon, interviewers' and respondents' constitutive contributions to the production of interview data" (114).

The choice of interviewees can be divided into three categories. The first group includes the professionals who worked on *The League of Gentlemen* and its various incarnations. The study recreates the show's production process by drawing information from original interviews with professionals such as Jemma Rodgers (producer), Jon Plowman (executive producer), Steve Pemberton (writer/performer), Yves Barre (costume designer) and Mike Nicholson (storyboard artist), supported by the analysis of paratextual networks. The second category consists of professionals who were not involved with *The League* directly but collaborated on other occasions with the people who worked on the show. These people also worked for the BBC and are able to provide insight into the corporation and television production in general. During the interviews, the discussion was not just about *The League* but also about other

shows the professionals worked on which can be useful for the analysis to draw out the various features of television production, as well as distinguishing ordinary and extraordinary practices. The original interviews were cross checked against the interviews with the same professionals from different periods in order to shed light on the issue of romanticisation of the past and to provide a critical approach. The interviews were not taken at face value as people's thoughts and feelings can change through time – for instance in the case of Stuart Murphy and Lucy Lumsden, the fact that they were working for Sky at the time of interviewing can alter their views about the BBC. The third category covers the reception side of television production. It consists of the interview with Ken Cross, one of the leading members of the League fan club, who organises fan activities. The insight Cross offered was useful in the analysis chapters, especially when it came to location.

Before the interview stage I took a training course from the Oral History Society, which focused on interview techniques, forming interview questions and finding solutions to common problems faced during interviews. Their guidelines were particularly useful in preparing interviewee consent sheets (Oral History Society 2011).

Accessing the interviewees required a journalistic approach. First, I carried out thorough research on the professionals who were involved in the making of *The League*. Then I widened my research by looking into people who worked with these professionals on different projects. For several months I conducted weekly online searches for these professionals, to establish the most current information about them: their agents, publishers, most recent companies or organisations they work for, their most recent projects, conferences, talks or events they would appear at, etc.

With the help of Prof. David Hendy, I prepared a sincere letter explaining my research project, which I adapted for each person I approached. Then I tried to reach these professionals through various channels. I sent both emails and letters to their agents, book publishers, past and present places of work, and organisers of the events at which they had appeared. I also sent them tweets via Twitter. Once I manage to access a couple of interviewees, it became a lot easier to arrange more interviews. Some of the interviewees were happy to provide e-mail addresses for other professionals. Also, it seemed that including the names of the people I already interviewed in my following letters gave me more credibility in the eyes of my future interviewees.

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Interestingly, due to their busy schedules, I did not get to do formal interviews with some of the professionals who agreed to meet. However, as they are still willing to speak to me I am planning to use the insights they will provide for future research.

Before going to my interviews I prepared by studying the backgrounds of my interviewees. I looked into their education, the projects they were involved in and the people they worked with. On the other hand, I also did comprehensive research on *The League of Gentlemen* through the paratexts discussed in the previous section. In the light of this research I created a list of main interview questions for each interviewee, which I believed would be most illuminating and fruitful for the study, as well as follow up questions that could be used if we had extra time. This comprehensive research was extremely useful, as it developed a trust between me and my interviewees. First of all, they realised that I knew quite a lot about the subject. Secondly, at this point I knew what was available in the public domain and what was missing. Therefore, I was not asking common questions that they already answered a million times before, but very specific and detailed questions that were intriguing for them. For example, I learned that after graduating from Bretton Hall Steve Pemberton joined a theatre company, where he was not only acting but also involved in the production side. I thought that this information could potentially help unlock new insights into the writer/performer's professional approach. Pemberton's answers proved that I was right. I could tell that he was very keen and interested to talk about and analyse, with me, how this experience came to influence his work (see chapter six). I could also see that my interviewees were happy to take the time to talk to me because of the approach I took, as they spared hours from their busy schedules. Some of my interviews lasted more than three hours, such as the Yves Barre and Jemma Rodgers interviews. I was able to talk to Jon Plowman for about two hours. Plowman seemed very pleased that he was speaking to someone who did their homework and was asking interesting questions. For example, about thirty-five minutes into our conversation he said, "Yes, well done! (Laughs) Thank you for knowing more than I do. So ask me something else" (Interview 2012).

2.4   Textual Analysis / Analysis of Moving Image

McKee (2006) describes text as "something that we make meaning from" (4) and notes that, "When we perform textual analysis, we make an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text" (1). Here Harley's metaphor of forensic science, to describe the interpretation process of textual analysis is useful (Hartley 1992; McKee 2006). Like the forensic scientists the analysts cannot go back in time and witness the event, the creation of a text; and can not be entirely sure about what happened. Yet, they can go through the evidence that is left and make an educated guess about what happened, based on the evidence. McKee (2006) indicates that interpretation of texts (e.g. films, television programmes, magazines, advertisements, etc.) helps obtain a sense of the ways in which, in particular cultures at particular times, people make sense of the world around them (whether it is the audiences or the creators of the texts).

While these discussions describe texts as 'social texts' that reflect and contribute to discussions on specific issues in a specific culture and time (Cottle 2003), which is utilised in the study of *The League*[2], Hansen, Cottle et al. (1998) flag up a significant question, "how far is it possible to pin down the meaning of any text, whether it be the meaning as intended by the producers of texts or the meaning as it is 'read' and understood by consumers/recipients of texts?" (94). The key discussions here revolve around interpretation and subjectivity in the analysis of moving image.

On the matter of subjectivity and objectivity Hansen, Cottle et al. (1998) indicate that no method of analysis of texts can be objective in a 'value free' sense of the word, as they do not intend to analyse everything there is to analyse in a text. Instead analysts delineate certain dimensions or aspects of a text for analysis, in doing so make certain choices, and indicate that the dimensions chosen for analysis are the important or significant aspects to look at. These choices, although in a sense subjective, are informed by the theoretical framework and ideas that the research revolves around, and thus are not randomly made.

In terms of textual analysis of the moving image the two key organising principles are narrative and genre, "... every moving image product has a relationship to

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[2]See *Chapter three Social Texts* for further analysis and discussions on the issue.

narrative, and that all products can be classified and understood in terms of genre" (Hansen, Cottle et al. 1998: 130). Hansen, Cottle et al. (1998) argue that the moving image researcher is able to break down signifying components and structures, without breaking up the object of study as a meaningful whole, by utilising the procedures provided by narrative and genre study. The authors indicate that such analysis does not only reveal "deep structures in texts", but also helps identify "the ideological positions and ideological messages within texts" (1998: 131). This then makes it essential for the researcher to gain a thorough knowledge of the codes and conventions that make up the language of the moving image. These elements can be divided in two categories: technical and symbolic, which appear both in narrative and genre study. The technical elements include camera angles, camera movement, shot duration, lighting, depth of field, editing, sound, and music. The symbolic codes include features such as colour or black and white, costume, objects, stars, performance, location and characters. Arguably the symbolic codes are more easily available to the audience than the technical features (Hansen, Cottle et al. 1998).

The textual analysis in this study started off with a theme map created before conducting the interviews, supported by the information drawn from the research on the paratextual surround. It focused on the contextual information, such as genre (e.g. horror), wider discourse in culture (e.g. North of England, 'Northernness', and writers' backgrounds) and 'intertexts' (other relevant texts). The key themes established here divided the analysis into four sections: sexuality and bodies, pastoralism and anti-pastoralism, 'Northernness', fandom and multi-mediality. This theme map was useful in constructing the interview questions and setting up the initial structure for the thesis. However, it had to be revised with the insight gained by deeper research and original interviews. This then revealed the key organising principles of the study, driven by genre and narrative study, which are the three main textual devices, narrative, location and character, as well as the production ecology of *The League*. These principles encompass the initially identified themes, for example pastoralism, anti-pastoralism and 'Northernness', are covered under location.

2.5 Conclusion

This study is an exercise of cross checking both in its methodology and its framework. Methodologically it takes information from various registers and puts them in a critical dialogue — such as first hand and second hand interviews, textual analysis and other written, oral and visual documents — to establish well-rounded insights. In terms of its framework, it puts various macro, meso and micro determinants – such as larger cultural and economic contexts, organisational structures and strategies, individual input, production atmosphere and working dynamics – in a critical dialogue to chart which determinants influence *The League*'s creation process in what ways, and the results of these interrelated influences.

As Richie (2003) and Berger (2000) indicate all materials (oral or written) should be considered suspect, and only by keeping sources tested against other evidence can we reach a more complete account. In this research oral history, textual analysis and study of paratextual networks complement each other to form a rounded understanding of the creation process of *The League* and the larger contexts (e.g. organisational, TV production, and British culture) it belongs to.

It is important to note the vast scale of production, the large amount of people involved with *The League* and the constraints on access to these professionals. This study does not provide insight from all the professionals involved in the creation process of *The League*. However, it provides insight from people within different professional categories – executive personnel, creative managers, primary creative personnel and technical staff (Hesmondhalgh 2007). This allows the study to construct a clear and integrated picture (see Born 2004; Seaton 2004). The next two chapters present the conceptual and theoretical framework of the study.

CONTEXTS: SOCIAL TEXTS

This chapter examines British social realism, English horror and English traditions. It explores their origins and history with a specific focus on the 20th century. These genres are intrinsic to our understanding of the League's works. They infuse the content, style and aesthetics of *The League* and its incarnations.

The chapter starts off with the examination of social realism, as it is widely acknowledged as the first and foremost signifier of 'social texts'. The second subsection, the examination of horror and comedy, further develops the notion of social text and emphasises that other media texts too fall into this category. Thus, this chapter establishes these media texts as social texts that have the capacity to reflect and challenge the society and contexts they are created in. It also recognises them as contributors to the formation of ideas about and attitudes towards key issues such as national identity. These texts are acknowledged as platforms for serious discussion where audiences can make sense of and ascribe meaning to their cultural state and identity. The exploration of the histories of social realism, horror and comedy traditions highlights that while texts belong to the periods they are created in, they also carry their history in them – see *2.1.1* (Genette 1982; 1997). As *chapter five*, *six* and *seven* illustrate, this is also true for *The League*. Therefore, the examination of the texts in this chapter provides an essential foundation for the analysis of *The League*.

The idea of polarisation becomes the locus of this chapter. Within the notion of polarisation, location based divisions that come across in three main forms, a) North and South, b) rural and urban, and c) the "European Other", are intrinsic, on the one hand, to understanding the 'state' of Britain – its culture, social structure and national identity(ies) – as well as understanding the chosen genres – their origins, styles, style shifts – and the texts that belong to these genres. Consequently, this chapter reveals the strong connection between texts and their contexts, and provides the necessary background that the study requires for an in-depth textual analysis.

The chronological exploration in this chapter identifies texts as socio-cultural products that belong to the period and genre they were conceived in and also carry their history in them, signifying the importance of history and genre for this study. The discussions in this chapter are useful to the analysis chapters (*chapters five*, *six* and *seven*) on location, character and narrative in *The League*. These analysis chapters map out how themes, issues and images within British culture as well as drama, comedy, gothic and horror genres explored in *chapter three* are utilised in *The League* (a comedy, horror and drama hybrid) and what their implications are. For example, the key themes of *chapter three* – polarisation, regional divide, rural and urban divide, 'Northernness', national identities, and escape – are embodied in the images and representations within *The League* and its incarnations. These elements help us read into the texts' representations of the small northern towns (Spent on the radio and Royston Vasey on the television programme) and their inhabitants.

3.1   Britain on Screen from the 1970s to the 2000

The narrative of Britain on screen (television and cinema) in any given decade is very much influenced and governed by the changing forces in that era. Accordingly, this section examines the political, economical and social landscape of Britain in the 1970s, the 1980s and the 1990s and then observes how these circumstances were represented in British film and television texts created in those times. It is rather striking that writers such as Hill (1999), Shail (2008), Cooke (2003), Leggott (2008), Lay (2002), Blake (2008) and Luckett (2000) reserve a good portion of their analysis of media texts to describing the political, economic and social climate. What these writers collectively suggest is that a wider exploration of the context in which a text is created affords us a deeper understanding of their content.

Respectively, the analysis of these decades includes examples of both film and television productions. Although the limits and extents of both industries and the way they are consumed by viewers are different, the social, political and economic context they emerge from are the same. Looking at both television and cinema texts broadens the scope of investigation.

The hypothesis here is that media texts reflect and contribute to discussions on the period and the society they are conceived in. In that sense, I regard media texts as 'social texts'. Here, the notion of social realism is quite relevant. Both in British cinema and television history, we observe a long-running social realist tradition. This, Hill (2000a) argues, is not the result of any coherent epistemological interest in the 'real', but rather derived from an urge to perceive and scrutinise social realities, in Williams' (1977) words, an impulse towards 'social extension'. This section explores what this concept means, and also pinpoints the shifts and continuities in its conventions. Afterwards, it employs this perspective on social texts to examine changes within Britain and its representations.

The decades are explored in a chronological order. Each sub-heading first starts off with the examination of the political, economic and social climate. This then leads to analysis of film and then TV texts in light of the discussions on the context. Within the analysis of texts, it draws out specific trends, and arguments while illustrating them with examples. Here the key themes are polarisation within British society in which the geographic divide stands out as well as the representation of marginalised people and places.

The texts that are explored here are well-known examples of the realist tradition. They are used as platforms of discussions of the key topics in this thesis. The theme 'marginalised people and marginalised places', that lies at the heart of British realist texts, is intrinsic to the "underbelly of TV representations" (see Stuart Murphy Interview 2011) such as *The League*.

3.1.1 *British Social Realism*

Writers such as Hill (1999, 2000a, 2000b), Williams (1977), Lay (2002) and Leggott (2008) explain what social realism means in the British context. According to Hill:

> In the history of British cinema, the claim to realism has traditionally depended upon a number of elements: a focus on 'ordinary' lives, a refusal of both the classical and melodramatic conventions of mainstream Hollywood, a use of techniques associated with documentary such as the

use of real locations, natural light, and an unadorned camera movement.
(1999: 134)

Hill (2000b) also underlines that the understanding of the notion of 'realist' drama, its conventions (in terms of form, aesthetics and content), the issues it tackles, the circumstances it is created in, what it reflects as well as contributes to, tend to change and are subject to historical variation. Similarly, Lay (2002) points out that social realism is both politically and historically contingent and it is "irrevocably tied to the specifics of time and place, or 'moment'" (6). Thus, the realist intention tries to do justice to the complexities of the contemporary world by adapting its conventions.

Among these shifts, one stable element that can be observed is a particular attention to the 'invisible' social groups that have been neglected in cultural representations (Williams 1977; Hill 1999). For example, this can be seen in traditional British social realism's strong preoccupation with industrial working class (Hill 1999). It is important to emphasise that these films were not simply representing the working-class but doing it from a particular social perspective (Hill 2000a).

This 'indigenous strain of social realist cinema' can be traced back to the 1930s documentary movement (Leggott 2008b: 94). Here, while the urge for embodiment of social extension, for-instance, is mutual both in 1950s/1960s 'kitchen sink' and 1990s 'Brit Grit', there are also significant differences among them. To be able to identify these continuing trends and shifts then we need to explore the times they are conceived in.

3.1.2   *1970s Britain: A divided kingdom in economic turmoil*

One leading theme in social realism and film-making in the 1970s has been the economic turmoil experienced in Britain during this decade (Shail 2008). Examining the 1970s, Leggott (2008) and Marwick (2003) point to various divisions in British society, some newly emerging during this period and some deeply rooted in British history – a regional divide between a deprived North and prosperous South, a geographical divide between rural and urban communities, a national divide between unemployed and employed, a racial divide between the immigrant communities and the white community, as well as an increasing class and gender divisions.

In the political context, the 1970s started off with the surprise emergence of the Heath government (1970–4). Morgan (1990) describes the course of the Conservative governments to be "marked by an increasingly intractable series of deadlocks and disputes, over industrial relations, Northern Ireland and finally the handling of the economy" (317), which proved to be traumatic for Britain plagued by strikes, inflation, unemployment and the 1970s oil crisis (Coxall and Robins 1998). According to an American report published in 1974, Britain's economic health was the worst in Europe (Shail 2008: xiii). When the Labour government took over from the Conservatives that year it faced major challenges in managing the economy (Morgan 1990; Coxall and Robins 1998).

These conditions heightened the already existing location based divisions in the UK. Marwick (2003) notes that observers in this period suggested a distinct geographical divide in British society "between a prospering South (the Midlands, everything to the South, but excluding Wales) and a backward, depressed North (everything beyond the Midlands)" (163), which was closely linked to economic circumstances. Marwick also points to a divide between the rural and urban spaces. For instance, one of the influential aspects was the 'invasion' of the rural territory of the poor by wealthy urban citizens. A consequence of this migration was the increase in the housing prices, which caused resentment amongst rural citizens. While the 'revolution in farming' can be seen as a positive element it was not enough to close the gap between the two divided spaces and cultures (see Marwick 2003).

The industrial strikes were an indication of the long standing employee-employer tensions, which were, in essence, based on a class tension, and turned into an open class conflict as struggles within the work place erupted onto the streets on a large scale. Marwick (2003) argues that the vast unemployment, especially among youths, and economic turmoil intensified social discomfort and heightened civil violence.

3.1.3 1970s Social Texts

The socio-political and economic background discussed above help us in the analysis of texts in terms of their representation of the society, as well as in drawing out key themes that arise within the cultural production of this decade. The exploration

starts with an examination of 1970s British cinema and then moves on to 1970s TV. Here the main texts are *The Likely Lads* (Michael Tuchner, 1976) and *Days of Hope* (BBC, September–October 1975). The exploration of the social realist films of this decade shows that while the 1970s cycle carried elements from earlier decades such as nostalgia for the past and the themes individual escape and resistance to change, it also departed from the British social realist tradition by engaging with new trends. These trends, such as representation of the growing underclass and embodiment of a heightened awareness, were also embodied in the following cycles. The examination of television texts of this period underlines the dominance of TV in the tradition of social realism and signifies TV texts' ability to create a forum for debate on economic, political and social contexts as well the understanding of the past and present of Britain. The exploration of both film and TV texts collectively reflect the concept of polarisation focusing on geographical divisions as well as industrial and class conflict.

Shail (2008) refers to the 1970s as an 'unpopular' decade, which has been 'neglected' as it is "caught between two more significant moments" (Higson cited in Shail 2008: xii): "the colourful exuberance and optimism of the 1960s and the incendiary antagonisms and defiance of the 1980s" (Shail 2008: xii). Shail traces the roots of the assumption of decline in British cinema and loss of taste in this decade back to the difference in filmmaking practices of the 1970s from previous (as well as the subsequent) periods and to the presumed decline in the tradition of social realist drama (see Leggott 2008b: 94).

In contrast Higson indicates that "cinema itself was not in decline, but was going through a complex process of diversification and renewal" due to the changes in aesthetic and content in this period (cited in Shail 2008: xvi). Shail suggests that the 1970s should be described as a period of 'volatility' and 'polarisation' as "British cinema was driven to extremes, sometimes in an attempt to attract new audiences, any audiences, but just as often to give expression to voices that had often been previously marginalised" (2008: xviii), in which the latter can be identified as a key characteristic of social realist drama. Leggott (2008b) identifies films such as *Bronco Bullfrog* (Barney Platts-Mills, 1969), *Akenfield* (Peter Hall, 1974) and *Nighthawks* (Paul Hallam, 1978) as some of the outstanding social realist texts of the 1970s and characterises certain shared themes: "ambivalence towards the idea of home and...a

tension between stasis and process of transformation or escape" (96), mirroring the era they were produced in. The preoccupation with individual escape, resistance and lack of collective action is a common trend shared by the 1960s as well as the following decades (Leggott 2008b).

One key branch of the theme individual escape is the "restless young man and his bumpy ride to maturity" (Leggott 2008b: 97) that can be observed in films like *The Likely Lads* (Michael Tuchner, 1976) – a cinematic spin-off from the popular television sitcom *Whatever Happened to the Likely Lads?* (BBC, 1973–4). Closely related to the social divisions in Britain, other key themes the film reflects have geographic significance: changes in the north of England (the destruction of the fabric of Newcastle and the related decline of industrial and working class culture), 'Northerness', and the urban/rural divide. Following these themes, the film continues the saga of middle-class Bob and working-class Terry, two life-long friends from Newcastle. It establishes the setting by reflecting the changing face of Newcastle, the destruction of old features of the city and the development of high-rise buildings. This setting also signifies the polarisation between the characters. On the one hand, Bob who is married and lives an ordinary domestic life feels sentimentality for the past, on the other hand Terry who leads a bachelor life in a high rise council flat seems to be more optimistic about the city's transformation. Using the standard generic trend of spin-offs, the plot removes the characters from their familiar environment as they go off to new adventures outside the city. This simultaneously emphasises the second geographic divide (urban and rural) as Bob and Terry are re-located from the city first to the countryside, and subsequently to the seaside. Following the theme escape, this re-location reflects the characters' attempts to escape their problems in the city and recapture the freedom of their youth. However, when their adventures do not go as they hoped, they return back to the city. The return to the initial state illustrates the impossibility of escape (Leggott 2008b), which arguably coincides with the grim socio-economic landscape of the decade.

Through the portrayal of the destruction of Newcastle, the film exhibits a somewhat middle-class nostalgia and the sentimentality of the 'outsider' for the decline of working-class tradition, which is an evident feature of the British social realist cinema made before and since (see Higson 1996; Leggott 2008b). However, while the film continuous that trend it also embodies something particular about the 1970s realist

cycle, a heightened sense of self-awareness. This is portrayed through the opposing attitudes of Terry and Bob, where one perceives change as loss of authenticity; the other embodies a positive and more careless demeanour.

Closely related to the theme of individual escape, Leggott (2008b) also observes an increasing interest in the issue of teenage delinquency and the representation of an 'underclass' as other notable elements of realist-inflected film-making of this era. Luckett (2000) acknowledges this end of the 1970s cycle as the emergence of an 'alternative cannon' that 'redefined' British cinema, stressing how this new image influenced the following decades. Luckett and Leggott both emphasise that certain films and images created in the 1970s, such as *Quadrophenia* (Frank Roddam, 1979), *Scum* (Alan Clarke, 1979) and *Bronco Bullfrog* gained iconic status, and anticipated the emergence of a new trend that focused on the representations of a marginalised underclass and alienated youth, which will be discussed in the following sections.

Brown (2009) and Lay (2002) point to television's significance and pivotal place in terms of social realism. Brown (2009) suggests that, especially from mid-1960s onwards, television dominated the tradition of social realism, and became the leading source of social realist texts. Lay (2002) and Leggott (2008b) note that creators like Ken Loach and Mike Leigh, who's names are associated with social realism, devoted themselves to television production especially during the 1970s. [1]

Cooke (2003) explains that the new social and political climate of the 1970s was widely portrayed and addressed in a large number of 'serious' dramas. According to Cooke, these shows were not merely 'reflecting' what was going on in society at the time but contributing to the formation of ideas about, and attitudes towards the 'state-of-the-nation' – particularly the collapse of political consensus, industrial and class conflict. Among such texts Jim Allen (the writer), Tony Garnett (the producer) and Ken Loach's (the director) four-part-series *Days of Hope* (September–October 1975) broadcast on BBC1, seems to stand out. Set between the outbreak of the First World War and the General Strike of 1926, the series centred around the experiences of an English working-class family. Some critics found Loach and Garnett's new project baffling, as these creators have been associated to work with contemporary issues. Although this was a historical piece, for Loach it helped to address the current situation of the time with the idea that history was repeating itself (Wilson 1975).

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[1] This was due to the conditions of the creative industries.

The creators' aims were to make the recent past accessible to people, to record 'working class' history, thus reflect what happened, and what its implications were, in order to dislodge persistent myths in the social conscience (Loach cited in Wilson 1975: 160).

Cooke (2003) indicates that the creators' political invention drew strong rightwing attacks as the serial broadcast soon after the 1973–4 miners' strike that had led to the termination of Heath's Conservative government. Due to the time and the context it was created in, *Days of Hope* sparked a wide scale public debate about the politics and form of radical television drama. While some questioned the limitations of a naturalistic costume drama series to have a political effect on people, some recognised the serial as a diffusion of socialist perspective on the main BBC channel at peak viewing time. Cooke (2003) argues that *Days of Hope* emphasised the ideological role that the radical TV drama could play at a time of great upheaval and reaffirmed the affectivity of television, BBC TV drama in particular, as a forum for political debate and oppositional voices.

3.1.4   *1980's Britain: A decade of polarisation gathered under Thatcherism*

Compared to the 1970s, the 1980s are described as a relatively coherent period at the political level: The premiership of Margaret Thatcher and the related phenomenon of 'Thatcherism', though not necessarily in a straightforward fashion, influenced the British cinema and television industry, and their output (Hill 1999). In order to understand and chart the connections between politics and media, as well as culture and society, this section discusses what 'Thatcherism' means and analyses the landscape of the time. It focuses on the two key elements (the neo-liberal economic approach and moral authoritarianism) of Thatcherism and explores their implications and consequences ('two nations' strategy, neo-conservatism, accentuated divisions between north and south of England, demise of working class and manufacturing industries, birth of a new 'service class', change in gender roles and increasing social disturbances). Here, the theme of polarisation gains greater significance. Exploration of the 1980s climate has particular significance as it was not only a period of social and political change but also a significant period in British broadcasting history and the BBC – which will be discussed in *chapter four*.

According to Marwick (2003), behind the reforms of the Thatcher Government there was a long term series of policy adjustments and critiques of earlier periods. The events in this decade signified the Conservatives' urge to establish a break from the past. Looking at the big picture, Marwick (2003), Riddell (1991), Morgan (1990), and Evans (2004) note polarisation within British society as the main characteristic of this period. For Marwick, the most obvious divisions were:

> the prospering South and declining North, between well-off suburbs and market towns, and decaying and conflict-ridden urban centres, and, this was the cruel new twist, between the urban habitations of the poor, and the redeveloped leisure centres and bijoux residences of yuppiedom... (2003: 241)

The academic literature on these developments indicate that economic divisions, such as the distribution of income, wealth, and employment, forged further divisions around region and geography, as well as gender, class and race relations. As discussed previously, some of these divisions were already established in the earlier periods, yet as the writers mentioned above suggest, these divisions were intensified by Thatcherite policies and maxims.

The financial side of the Thatcherite project, its neo-liberal approach, emerged as a strong reaction to the economic problems in Britain, acknowledged the past regime and its 'dependency culture' responsible for such troubles and promised an 'economic miracle' by supporting a new wave of enterprise and individualism (Morgan 1990; Hill 1999). The results of this ambitious project were decidedly mixed. The Thatcher government's monetarist strategy, striving to control inflation rather than reducing unemployment (Coxall and Robins 1998), was expected to cut public spending and reduce inflation, however, it ended up doing exactly the reverse (Morgan 1990; Hill 1999). Government policies caused a dramatic rise in unemployment, which by 1981 was approaching three million, an increase that was not seen since the thirties (Morgan 1990). All over the country factories, mills and pits were closing down, and "Britain's productive capacity was falling more rapidly than at any time since the dawn of the industrial age" (Morgan 1990: 446). The government slowly dropped its monetarist pursuits "but only after it contributed to an unnecessarily severe recession in 1980–1 in which much manufacturing capacity was lost for good" (Coxall and Robins 1998: 46).

During this period the group that benefitted from the Conservatives' actions were the very rich (Hill 1999). In an attempt to 'redefine' old-consensus Thatcherism developed a 'two nations' strategy (Morgan 1990). This divide was not only between the 'peripheral' workers, the long-term unemployed and the poor, and the very rich, but also between the core workers in the manufacturing industries and the new 'service class' in the private sector, a class type that considered to be a product of Thatcherism (Jessop et al., cited in Hill 1999: 7). While the number of manual workers employed in manufacturing industries was shrinking dramatically, the number of self-employed entrepreneurs was increasing. This reduction in the size of the working class, however, did not necessarily diminish class divisions. British society was still deeply class driven and people continued to strongly identified within their class (Marwick 2003). Yet, what the new 'enterprise culture' brought up was an opportunity for upward mobility, from which the 'yuppie' culture came about. In the era of buying and selling, the infliction of privatisation, combined with vigorous propaganda on behalf of the notion that success was far more important than social origins, formed the basis of yuppie phenomenon (Marwick 2003). For the traditional working-class, this new phenomenon was not only a threat to their occupational functions and incomes, but also towards their values and customs.

The economic inequalities and the 'two nations' strategy forged greater polarisation between north and south. While the private sector services concentrated on the south, the north formed Britain's industrial base. With the rising importance of the service sector and the subsequent decline of manufacturing there was an immense increase in unemployment in the north (Hill 1999). The industrial decline caused series of long and violent industrial strikes against factory closures and low wages.

The restructuring of the labour force had further consequences. With the decline of the manufacturing sector, the increase of part-time work in the service sector, plus changes in technology and in consumption patterns, the number of women taking part in the workforce increased dramatically (Wilson cited in Hill 1999). The increase in male unemployment with the demise of the manufacturing industries and the increasing number of women taking part in the growing service industries formed the basis of the change in gender roles, followed by gender division and social anxieties. Wilson (2007) notes that men were still more likely to identify themselves through their work than their family life, and, arguably, with the erosion of the traditional

skilled jobs and the masculine ideal of the breadwinner, many working-class men suffered a crisis of self-image.

The notable characteristics of this period, the accentuated economic and social divisions, increasing violent and sexual crimes, an inclination towards senseless violence without a specific cause and a growing sense of fear within society denotes Britain as a disturbed place to live (Marwick 2003). Needless to say, the state of Britain, bound up in moral and economic decline, is far removed from how it used to be perceived in the Victorian period – harmonious and elevated. This moral decline coincides with the second part of Thatcherite project, moral authoritarianism. Setting itself against the post-war ideology of previous governments, as well as the 'promiscuity and permissiveness' of the 1960s, Thatcherism was not only striving for an economic reconstruction but also a social and cultural one. In a conflicting fashion, the ideology was economically modern, but socially and culturally traditional and backward looking, hence combining "the neo-liberal economic precepts of 'self-interest, competitive individualism, anti-statism' with the organic conservative themes of 'tradition, family and nation, respectability, patriarchalism and order'" (Hall cited in Hill 1999: 8). For Cooke (2003), Thatcherism was striving for a time when Britain was still 'Great', a time of economic stability and power. It was trying to achieve this through a modern, neo-liberal economic approach, yet was also rooting for Victorian values, therefore using modern economic approach to go back to the past, traditional society and culture.

These discussions on 1980s Britain and the dominance of Thatcherism reflect a divided nation. In the light of the arguments presented on this subject, we can define Thatcherism, in a broad sense, by its 'two nations' approach forging greater divisions in British society – which were established in previous years. The conservative governments' monetarist strategy not only engineered a dramatic rise in unemployment, heightening the national divide between unemployed and the rest of the society, but also heightened the regional division between north and south with the mass de-industrialisation of the North and the creation of the service sector in the South. The formation of a new service sector, in turn, heightened class and gender divisions. The class divide was linked to the emergence of a new class type, the 'service class', formed by the people employed in the private sector. This new class was seen to represent a further decline in working-class traditions and values that were already

damaged by the demise of manufacturing industries. The gender divide was also closely linked to de-industrialisation. With men loosing their jobs in manufacturing industries, and women increasingly contributing to the service sector, men seemed to feel a sense of loss of identity. While traditional gender roles still abide deep in the social psyche, there seemed to be a social uneasiness in the air.

3.1.5 *1980s Social Texts*

The notion of Thatcherism is significant to our understanding of 1980s British cinema and television. We can identify two distinct types of texts: traditional (or 'heritage') texts preoccupied with the past versus a more unorthodox, and socially aware, texts concerned with the present (Hill 1999). Although, not all texts of the period are obviously linked to Thatcherism, the latter cycle – which can be described as 'state-of-the-nation'- tends to carry out anti-Thatcherite sentiments (Hill 1999). This section explores the 'state-of-the-nation' film cycle. It examines *High Hopes* (Mike Leigh, 1988) and *Britannia Hospital* (Lindsay Anderson, 1982) to gain a deeper understanding. Thereafter it looks at television and explores *Boys from the Blackstuff* (BBC, 1982) as an example of TV texts' ability to bring new dimensions to the British realism of this era. The key issues that are emphasised are the themes of demise of traditional working class values, of escapism and individualism that are observed in previous decades, of unemployment, lack of images of actual labour, depiction of wastelands and crisis of masculinity. These are important themes that we also find in *The League*. The discussion on 'Englishness' is also a key theme in section *3.2,* that focuses on horror and comedy texts, which again have an important place in *The League,* and is discussed in *chapter five* 'Location & Sense of Place in *The League of Gentlemen'* and *chapter six* 'Character in *The League of Gentlemen'*.

The 'state-of-the-nation' films of the 1980s were socially conscious works that followed the tradition of social critique and examination of contemporary life, however in this period depictions of the traditional working-class and industrial activity were rare to find (Hill 1999) This was closely linked to the social, political and economic circumstances of the time. The representation of the working-class hero as the central protagonist faded away, since the traditional working-class no longer existed.

Films such as *High Hopes* continued the long running theme of the demise of the traditional working-class, the growing corruption of working-class values by consumerism, escapism and individualism. They reflected escapism, upward mobility and ambition, yet also enhanced them through the portrayal of "a world characterized by superficiality and self-interest of the new Thatcherite era" (Hill 1999: 142). For instance, *High Hopes* portrays the ambition for upward mobility of the new working class associated with lack of good taste and materialism. Reflecting the heightened class division in Thatcher's England, the film revolves around working-class, middle-class and upper-middle-class couples. The key element here is that while the film exhibits socialist concerns, it does not provide a one-sided perspective. The film, along with the 'yuppies' and the middle-class couple, also targets the working classes as a source of mockery by questioning their dedication to 'socialism' and their interpretation of Marxism. The film's complex relationship with its characters signals one of the key aspects of this cycle. Whilst focusing on the working class as victims of harsh economic conditions, such films struggle to impose 'positive values' on their working-class characters (Hill 1999).

The decline of the traditional working class is also linked to unemployment and space, since the idea of traditional working class "rested upon the strong sense of culture and community that grew out of shared employment and geographical location" (Hill 2000b: 251). Accordingly, in films such as *Letter to Brezhnev* (Chris Bernard, 1985) and *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (Alan Clark, 1986), "the decline of the working class 'way of life' is identified not with affluence or upward mobility but with the collapse of traditional heavy industries (especially in the North) and associated experiences of unemployment and poverty" (Hill 2000b: 251–252). Ultimately this was the result of a lack of representation of traditional working class, its life style, images of actual work, portrayal of community or collective action. The erosion of the traditional working class was mostly showcased through the experiences of the north via unemployment and poverty created by the industrial decline, which in turn altered the imagery associated with the North (Hill 1999). Thus in the 1980s, factories became wastelands and images of work are linked to the service sector (especially shops) rather than manufacturing (Hill 1999: 167). These images also have great significance for *The League* (see *chapter five*).

The manufacturing industries, labour work and union power that tend to define the traditional working class was also an important aspect of the notion of masculinity (Rutherford 1988; Hill 1999; Spicer 2001). Although the portrayal of crisis in masculinity and the damaged man are common features in British film history, the underclass male representations of the 1980s embody structural differences (Spicer 2001). For instance, the underclass man seems to loose the 'playboy' image of the working class hero of the 1960s (Hill 2000b); develops fears of social and sexual insecurity by the lack of "traditional strengths of working-class masculinity: a secure place as the principal breadwinner and head of the family, and comradeship with mates at work or in a union" (Spicer 2001: 188).

Examining how these films address 'national allegory' Hill (1999) indicates that they suggest a "world of increasing social differences, divisions, and conflicts", as in *Britannia Hospital* where the "'national allegory' [is used] to represent social breakdown" (137). The film portrays Millard, a crazy professor, who uses National Health funds for his Genesis Project, an attempt to create the perfect human. In a Frankenstein like attitude, Millard murders patients and use their body parts for his ventures. For Hill (1999), by using the corrupted hospital as metaphor for Thatcherite Britain, the film comes across as a satirical assault on the social injustice, which Thatcherist individualist attitude and entrepreneur ideology foster. The film also provokes reflection on English identity as it expresses conflicts and complexities in this concept Englishness. Here, the publics' deep resentments against the State via the hospital, the polarisation between the rich and poor, as well as the mad doctor's attitude against the English patients, signify the dislocation of English society. Millard's attempt to create the 'perfect' human, in a sense reflects English society as imperfect and 'Englishness' as inadequate. What we observe in Britannia Hospital, then, is a struggle to represent 'Englishness', as well as "the disintegration of the national community and the 'death' of traditional English virtues" (Hill 1999: 138). These discussions help us understand the social structure of the fictional town Royston Vasey and its residents.

Observing television in this era, Hill (1999) highlights that TV brought a new dimension to conventional British realism. For Hill, as a notable example, the BBC's television serial *Boys from the Blackstuff* "displayed a certain readiness to go beyond its conventions and make use a degree of stylization and fantasy..." (1999: 135),

which helped the show to surpass the surface realities and express deeper levels of insight. Following the dominant theme of Thatcherite economic policies and its effects, *Boys from the Blackstuff* presented a de-industrialised North, focusing on the urban decay of Liverpool. The show explored the key term of this decade, unemployment along with urban decay, spiritual deprivation and the sense of worthlessness that many people feel on the Dole (see Millington 1984).

Similar to the cinema texts in this period, the show lacks images of large scale labour. It portrays images of men waiting on the dole, talking about work, looking for work, organising illegal jobs, and doing little bits, instead of a work force. With a character-based approach, the series explores the experiences of the working-class, especially the Liverpudlian working-class. Among the characters, Yosser, became a folk martyr of popular culture, while some of his idioms became nation-wide catch phrases such as "Gizza job!" (Millington 1984; Cooke 2003). The writer and the actors received thousands of letters from the viewers expressing how they felt that the series was telling their story and presenting their situation (Bleasdale, Walters et al. 2011).

Millington (1984) underlines that the show established a change in the conventions and audience expectations of Northern fictions, which forged the representation of Liverpool on screen to be associated with "unemployment, working-class resilience to social hardship and, above all, comedy in the face of adversity" (126). *Blackstuff* was followed by few other progressive dramas such as Channel 4's Brookside (1982) focusing on the effects of long-term unemployment, a theme that coincides with several Liverpool feature films such as *Letter to Brezhnev*, *Business as Usual* and *No Surrender* (Peter Smith, 1985) (Millington 1984). As the exploration in *chapter five* and *chapter six* reveals, a similar approach is also evident in *The League*. For example, one of the key sketch strands both in the radio and television series is about a re-start course where all the attendees are men. Millington (1984) and Cooke (2003) observe a shift towards the private, as in *Blackstuff*, the narratives focusing on the exploration of the consequences of the effects of Thatcherism within domestic spaces. Cooke underlines the introduction of men into the domestic space in recognition of the changes in gender roles that were taking place in the wider society.

3.1.6   *1990s Britain: Thatcher Legacy*

Writers such as Leach, Coxall and Robins (2006), Childs (2006) and Marwick (2003) see the 1990s as a continuing branch of Thatcherism. Although this era saw the leadership of both Modern Conservative and New Labour governments, they were both very much under the influence of Thatcherism, and hence had to tackle its legacies. The seeds of social diffusion that were planted during the Thatcher era started to grow in the 1990s, creating a consistently more divided Britain. By the end of the 1990s there was a release of economic tension but on a deeper level there were intense social and cultural anxieties, a sense of end of century crisis in national identity and a crisis in masculinity.

3.1.7   *The Shadow of the Past: Modern Conservatism & New Labour*

Leach, Coxall and Robins (2006) interpret Major's six-and-a-half year premiership as a prolonged coda to Thatcherism, yet also describe Major's style to be more consensual. When Major took over as prime minister, the economy was in the first phase of another recession (Coxall and Robins 1998). There were also strong divisions within the Conservative Party (Marwick 2003). Yet, against all the odds in the 1992 elections Major managed to continue the Conservative leadership (Childs 2006).

In the first half of the 1990s a wider framework of economic, technological and global factors, which were formed in the eighties, came fully in place (Marwick 2003). These factors introduced new insecurities into the lives of people in all social classes. Elements included high investment into unproductive sectors of the economy (e.g. service and property) that resulted in a decline in the country's standard of living and an increase in unemployment (Marwick 2003), heavy taxation (Marwick 2003; Leach, Coxall et al. 2006), a disinterest in the issue of sexuality (e.g. gay rights) (Marwick 2003), inept and immoral policies about race relations issues (Marwick 2003; Childs 2006), and ill-fated attempts to reform family values and morals (Leach, Coxall et al. 2006). Series of scandals involving low-level corruption, and sexual misbehaviour that Conservative ministers and MPs were caught up in also scarred the credibility of the Government (Leach, Coxall et al. 2006). Together with these

the issue of European Union and ERM, or most importantly the way Major handled them, dealt a blow to his government and the Conservative Party from which it was not able to recover (Marwick 2003; Childs 2006).

In the 1997 elections, Labour, as a transformed party under its new leader Tony Blair, returned to power with a huge majority. However, while Blair's New Labour showed elements of change, arguably, it also showed continuity with the past in several ways. For instance, it accepted much of Thatcherism and embodied a 'right-of-centre' position (Coxall and Robins 1998). Under the New Labour economic and social change appeared more modest, with a significant level of continuity (Leach, Coxall et al. 2006).

One of the implications of New Labour taking over some policies and values associated with their old opponents, and embodying an ideology of enterprise, achievement and merit was the widening gap between rich and poor (Childs 2006). However, the Government saw this as a legacy of the previous Conservative governments. By 1999 there were significant improvements. For instance, unemployment was lower than it had been for twenty years (Childs 2006).

Seeing the role that the scandals played in the previous Conservative government's decay, Blair pursued an openness policy (Childs 2006). Arguably, this attitude not only reflected New Labour's attempts to secure public trust, but also demonstrated a level of acceptance and open-mindedness in terms of sexuality and sexual orientation, which was not present during eighteen years of Conservative leadership.

At the breach of the new millennium, Britain, compared to its European neighbours, was lagging in few areas such as the national health service. Alcohol and drug abuse were also posed major problems. There was a palpable sense of individualism in the air. Some suggest that the 'millennium hype' contributed to a sense of anti-climax and depression (Childs 2006). However, Childs argues that, "British people were freer than they had been at any other time and they were certainly enjoying unprecedented prosperity. Real disposable incomes had roughly doubled since 1970" (2006: 335). On the eve of the upcoming election, this was the state of Britain. While Blair had to face major challenges, his party seemed to be optimistic.

3.1.8   *1990s Social Texts*

While the academic literature establishes the political consensus of the 1990s as a 'post-Thatcher' establishment (Crewe 1993 cited in Coxall and Robins 1998), 1990s film and television texts depict a 'post-Thatcherite' Britain (Hallam 2000). These texts focus on the two major consequences of Thatcherism: the 'post-industrialised' spaces (re-identification of certain places as they have been pushed to the margins by local industrial decline, reconstruction of labour market and embodiment a 'two-nations' attitude) as well as the 'post-working class' (Hallam 2000; Hallam and Mashment 2000). They simultaneously advance some of the trends of the previous cycles, while reversing others (see Hill 1999; Monk 2000b). The elements that unite the 1990s social realism, 'Brit-Grit', are "an obsessive focus on white, non-working masculinity" (Monk 2000b: 276), and re-articulation of working-class identity with geographical specificity, again "depicted not as the collective political unity of a group in society but as a site for exploring the personal stagnation, alienation and social marginalisation of their (primarily) white male characters" (Hallam 2000: 261). This signifies a preoccupation with marginalised places and marginalised people, with the 'otherness' of those places and people (Hallam and Mashment 2000). These are also key themes in *The League of Gentlemen* and form the basis of *chapter five* 'Location & Sense of Place' and *chapter six* 'Character'. Although the series does not specify a time frame, the images and the characters signify the notion 'post-industrialised' marginalised places and marginalised people.

Within the geographical marginalisation, through which the films explore the relation between space, identity and gender, a large number of films such as *Brassed Off* (Mark Herman, 1996) and *The Full Monty* (Peter Cattaneo, 1997) reflect the "socio-economic confinement of contemporary urban life..." (Hallam and Mashment 2000: 192), "rooted in Northern urban settings which are less romanticized than those of the early 1960s films, where poetic realism tended to prettify the grim landscape" (McFarlane 2009: 369). Hence, this cycle re-works "old myths and stereotypes of the North" (Hallam 2000: 269). For instance, *The Full Monty*[2], in its representation of Sheffield, prefers the image of dirt, grime and economic depression, rather than the

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[2]A film that is referenced at various times in *The League* – see for instance TV series one episode one.

modern face of the city. While this 'grim' imagery is associated with authenticity – the traditional working-class, its values and their demise, the new face of the North, the suburbs and housing estates, are depicted as soulless with no sense of community. Such films "re-imagine the 'working-classness' of their characters through their relations with consumption rather than production, purchasing power rather than labour power" (Hallam 2000: 261). What these arguments then suggest is that as the geographical landscape, the physical context, starts to change, the mental states and the identities of the people who occupy these places as well as the concepts that they embody go through a transformation, too. This analysis is helpful for our understanding of the fictional places and people of *The League* (see *chapter five* and *chapter six*).

Although the issue of unemployment and its effects are treated differently in each film, for Hill (2000a), Luckett (2000) and Hallam (2000) depictions of unemployment and industrial decay in the north of England suggest a crisis in masculinity similar to the 1980s. According to Monk (2000b), "In the 1990s, British cinema, and popular culture more generally, has addressed male anxieties relating to perceived shifts in workplace and gender power via three main strategies" (280), which are: a direct acknowledgement of male anxieties and search for (re)solutions, an attempt for retrenchment of male power via a mechanism of escapist denial that embodies a degree of sexism and misogyny, and lastly a retreat into nostalgia for old patriarchal hierarchies. For example, in *The Full Monty* the unemployed men find a resolution in replacing their former occupations in the labour industry with new roles in the 'service industry', thus re-define the traditional understanding of masculinity, yet at the same time 'reclaim' their male status and pride.

This cycle also offers a kind of utopianism of the possibilities for collective action and unity, through their male characters' non-labour or non-political activities, using the idea of working-class community "as a metaphor for the state of the nation" rather than "in the service of class politics" (Hill 2000a: 183). The representations within these films reveal "a certain yearning for 'national wholeness' in the face of economic and social divisions and the rise of self-interested individualism that characterised the Tory years" (Hill 2000a: 184). Similarly, there is an awareness of the absence of a unified national identity in 1990s British cinema that envisioned nation and space from multiple and often conflicting perspectives, regionalism being an impor-

tant one (Luckett 2000). Luckett (2000) argues that during this period, under Tony Blair's new Labour Government, Britain faced "the challenge of re-imagining itself as ultra-modern while simultaneously being renowned for its history, replacing and reconfiguring Thatcherism's combination of economic 'modernity' and veneration of 'heritage'" (90). Monk (2000b) suggests that many films project British identity as urban, post-working-class rather than bourgeois and rural, embracing regional identities, especially northern English, rather than the south. Another important aspect emerges is a sense of "a fin de millennium crisis of British national, post-imperial identity" (Farrell 2003: 120), linked to the 'threat' of European federalisation and a fear of the break up of the United Kingdom (Luckett 2000).

During the 1990s, just like British society, the television industry was too going through major changes. This was reflected on the TV texts that were being made and the ones that weren't given green light for commission. As discussed earlier, in the 1960s and 1970s TV played a significant role in social realist tradition. However, the paradigm shifts in TV production and application of free market principles to broadcasting that started in the 1980s subsequently led to a decline in 'social issue' dramas on television (see Cooke 2003; Eaton 2005). This new broadcasting environment, a consequence of Thatcherite period, continued stronger into the 1990s (see *chapter four*). It was within this environment television drama had to re-invent itself (Cooke 2003).

Shows such as *Our Friends in the North* (BBC, January–March 1996) are a testament to the progressive social issue dramas that were made during this period. *Our Friends* was a nine-part serial that followed the life stories of four friends from north-east England through 1964 to 1995. The characters' personal stories were told against a backdrop of massive social and political change in Britain during this period. The programme focused on key moments in the British history and reflected its effects on the lives of the ordinary people. Similar to *Days of Hope*, *Our Friends* aimed to look at the past to understand the present and envisage the future (see Smith 1996; Cooke 2003).

The show followed the tradition of social realism but with a different appeal that lies in its melodramatic approach (Cooke 2003). It embodied key themes such as the polarisation within Britain (e.g. the gap between rich and powerful minority and the poor, as well as the regional divide between the north and south of England with

a focus on the north). Within the examination of space, the show played with the meanings of urban spaces, for example through the portrayal of Soho in London that reflected moral demise versus the changing fabric of Newcastle, the new model flats and high-rise housing that simultaneously symbolised change, progress and corruption. The spaces and the people who occupied them fit in with the general theme marginalised places (i.e. bohemian cafe, asylum, demolished flats) and marginalised people (e.g. assistant to a Soho porn king, mad retired policemen, personal assistant to a corrupt government official, woman trapped in a loveless marriage, elderly who are lost in the contemporary world). The show reflected deep anxieties about the state of Britain (see Eaton 2005) that coincided with discussions about the social, political and economic context of Britain at the end of the 20th century where economic crisis were seemingly under control, but deeper anxieties were lurking underneath the surface.

3.1.9 *Summary of 3.1*

This part of the literature review explored the function of media texts in reflecting the society they are created in. It also underlined that media texts contribute to the discussions of those issues that are at the heart of social concerns. In this sense, these texts become vehicles through which viewers can speculate and question the circumstances that they live in. It is crucial to stress the role of British social realist texts as an impulse to discover, understand and represent changes within a society. This argument is highly relevant in understanding the style of *The League* (see *chapter five*, *chapter six* and *chapter seven*).

Examining the economic, political and social landscape of Britain from the 1970s to the end of the 1990s, as well as the representations of Britain offered by certain social texts, this sub-chapter drew out key themes, continuing trends as well as irregularities. Polarisation was the pivotal theme running throughout these decades. Here economic, regional and geographic divisions were extremely important. The literature highlighted that some of these divisions already existed within British society, yet they were heightened during the Thatcherite years, and reached a climax in the 1990s. This was also reflected in media texts. While the theme individual escape and resistance to change were predominant throughout the social realist cycles of the

1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, it was increasingly coupled with portrayal of crisis in masculinity and a sense of a loss of national identity. Whilst images of labour diminished, the changing face of the North, 'grim' landscapes and wastelands dominated the screens. The film and television texts forged complex relationships with their characters where nothing was black and white. One integral aspect was that they all focused on marginalised spaces and marginalised people. It is critical to emphasise that the long running recession and tensions that in this episode of British history, decreased by the end of the 1990s. However, this time, the heart of social discomfort was occupied by deeply rooted social and cultural anxieties. The key themes, polarisation within British society (where geographic divisions stand out), marginalised places and marginalised people underlined the absence of a unified national identity and the complexities of defining national identity. These aspects are also key issues that are discussed in the next section on national styles of horror and comedy. Most importantly, the images and themes that dominate these texts also found their way in the League's creations – their representations of small northern towns and their inhabitants.

3.2   Genre: Horror & Comedy

Exploration of horror and comedy is intrinsic for this thesis as the League quartet is recognised for their unique style that hybridises these two genres. Their works carry essences from the long-running English horror and comedy traditions including English Gothic literature, horror texts such as Amicus productions and works of comedy of embarrassment such as Alan Bennett's creations. The key themes this sub-chapter establishes are employed in the first three analysis chapters (*chapter five, six* and *seven*).

Studies by Medhurst (2007), Lockyer (2010), Gray (2005), Cooke (2003), Pirie (2008), Grixti (1989) and Blake (2008), all recognise horror and comedy texts as socio-cultural products. They provide an understanding of social context, and the era that they emerge in. As such, these writers, collectively, designate comedy and horror texts as platforms for serious discussions about various issues like sexuality and national identity, which are important themes that emerge in *The League*.

This sub-chapter focuses on the literature related to these two genres, starting off with the exploration of horror. *3.2.1* traces the roots of English horror back to English Gothic literature – covering a period from the 18th century to the end of the 20th century – and identifies the characteristics of this tradition such as a preoccupation with excess, irrational, otherness and visual/emotional appeal of ruins. The notion of otherness is especially intrinsic in understanding the relationship between, gothic, horror and British national identity(ies). The idea of the 'European Other' that helped establish 'Britishness' in the 18th century and the subsequent shift towards the 'Other Within' – rural/urban, pastoralism/anti-pastoralism – which shaped ideas about British national identity and different versions of it; reflects the significance of gothic and horror for understanding British culture, national identity and its shifts. The examination of texts and social context signify that both gothic and horror texts all the way from the 18th century to the end of the 20th century embodied the notion of otherness and reflected issues about British and/or English national identity(ies).

The exploration of the 20th century British horror history (3.2.2) highlights how the ideas and feelings introduced by the gothic tradition are deeply embedded in English culture and gothic's key product, the horror genre. It scrutinises horror's struggle against the tradition of realism. It also underlines horror's capacity to tap into contemporary issues and signify its role as a platform for exploring social anxieties and personal fears. Collectively, these two sections emphasise that although texts created at different times by different companies had different styles, and reflected different anxieties connected to the period they are conceived in, they all carry elements form the gothic tradition in their DNA.

Exploration of comedy begins with the history of English comedy in the 20th Century where key cycles are examined. Similar to the argument on horror, exploration of comedy cycles underline that while comedy texts belong to their time, they also carry their predecessors in them. The shared aspects that stand out here are absurdity and the grotesque. Respectively, the sections "Comedy of Embarrassment" and "Grotesque and Absurdity" explore the role of the comic and underline the complexities in comedy by scrutinising four aspects: pleasure derived from dealing with taboo subjects, inclusive and exclusive trades of comedy, comedy as a relief of tension and comedy as a source of anxiety. This framework highlights the paradoxical

nature of comedy where pleasure and discomfort coincide. The exploration points to comedy's capacity as a platform for understanding national identity and culture, especially through the exploration of the theme of regional and geographic divides. It also highlights the relationship between comedy and horror through the notions irrationality, anxiety, discomfort, polarisation, the grotesque, and absurdity. This connection is highly significant in understanding not only comedy and/or horror texts but also their hybrids such as *The League of Gentlemen.* The key themes that emerges from this sub-chapter – a preoccupation with excess, irrationality, otherness in English identity and visual/emotional appeal of ruins, a sense of surrealism, rural/urban divide, pastoralism and anti-pastoralism, the link between pleasure and discomfort, the grotesque, absurdity, geographical polarisation, comedy as a relief of tension and as a source of anxiety – support and enrich the textual analysis of *The League* and also shed light on several aspects of its creative process – e.g. commissioning, finding the filming location, costume design and audience relationship.

3.2.1   *Origins of English Horror Genre: English Gothic literature, the 'Other' and national identity*

Investigation of the origins of English horror illustrates how this genre is intact with English national identity and culture. Writers such as Pirie (2008), Jones (2002) and Grixti (1989) indicate that the origins of horror can be found in English Gothic Literature. Accordingly, English horror inherited some of the distinct characteristics of the English gothic tradition: interest in excess and exaggeration, visual/emotional appeal of ruins, fascination with the irrational and chaos, a sense of surrealism and the concept of 'otherness'. Academic literature suggests that the idiosyncrasy of English Gothic, English horror and the themes that they embody are both by-products and components of English culture and national identity. Thus, they not only reflect but also play significant roles in the formation of English national identity and culture. The concept of 'otherness' has further importance in the development of the Gothic novel, modern horror fiction and 'Englishness'. This concept demonstrates the complex nature of English national identity as well as the significance of geographical and regional polarisation to it. The analysis in *3.2.1* emphasise that the theme of polarisation between rural and urban as well as the changing meanings of these spaces are closely linked to the social, cultural and economic context. This

framework highlights the relevance of horror texts in understanding English culture, society and history.

The English Gothic novelists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century were not an exceptional phenomenon but a part of a wider cultural movement within Europe (see Grixti 1989; Pirie 2008). Yet, these authors developed certain themes that had specific English resonance (Pirie 2008). The themes that dominate the Gothic movement, such as supernatural horrors, horrific monsters and violence, were also explored in many works of literature before the eighteenth century – e.g. the Odyssey and La Divina Commedia (Grixti 1989). The key separation between such works and the Gothic fictions of the 18th century is that the latter accorded positive values to concepts like the medieval, the primitive and the wild, which was coupled with a fascination with excess and exaggeration (Grixti 1989: 17). Respectively, Gothic can be seen as a product (or by-product) of the Enlightenment, more specifically of its 'underside' or the 'unconscious'. While the "Enlightenment valued reason, order, modernity, the Gothic acted as a negative image, imagining forth the irrational, chaos, the past…" (Grixti 1989: 77).

Surrealism, a key element of gothic irrationality, offers an interesting example. Due to its Gothic tradition, England, in the early 20th century, was expected to produce a fully established Surrealist movement. However, this did not occur. Although the rich and fertile cultural milieu of the English Gothic tradition did not flourish into a distinct national art movement, surrealism along with other pivotal aspects such as fascination with wastelands, excess and chaos, leaked into cultural elements such as the horror genre (Pirie 2008). English horror was weaved from very distinct English attitudes, emotions and interests. The elements of the Gothic and how they became intrinsic to English culture and daily life are essential to the analysis of *The League* and are explored in *chapter five*.

Jones' (2002) arguments further the relationship between gothic, horror and English culture and identity, "The development of Gothic novel, and thus of modern horror fiction, in English… coincides with (both a component and a by-product of) the period of the formation of a British national identity" (8), therefore "Modern Britain was conceived in horror" (8). Anderson's influential framework of the 'imagined community' that assumes the concept of nation to be problematic and fluid, is highly relevant. Taking this idea on board, Jones (2002) suggests that national

identities are often defined by opposition, "in a Self-Other relationship to a (usually neighbouring) rival nation, which is made to embody all that is venal, reprehensible, archaic, or otherwise rejected. For Britain, this vilified Other was France" (8). British, however, had an antagonistic attitude towards all their European neighbours. A key reason behind this attitude was that Brits were an island nation, which has never been invaded during the 18th century wars. By the end of the 18th century in Britain, there was major political unrest and agitation for Catholic emancipation that was perceived as another threat to Protestant British identity, which consequently led to the emergence of the Romantic Gothic novel (Jones 2002). Accordingly, "...by imagining forth the European Other as Catholic, superstitious, barbarous, irrational, chaotic, rooted in the past, the Gothic novel allowed a British audience conversely to identify itself as Protestant, rational, ordered, stable, and modern..." (Jones 2002: 9). For instance, the representation of the European 'Other' was embodied in Bram Stoker's Dracula (1897) through the portrayal of Transylvania. Count Dracula reflected a Victorian anxiety of reverse-colonisation embedded in the idea that Dracula's mission was to conquer England (Jones 2002).

These discussions place the notion of the 'Other' at the heart of English Gothic literature, modern horror fictions, English culture and national identity. However, the notion of otherness constantly shifts and transforms through time with changes in circumstance. In 18th century Gothic the 'Other' was an alien other, and represented anxieties about external threats as in the European Other. Yet, if we jump to the 20th century the 'Other' is explored within the British Isles, and starts to become the regional or rural other – the 'Other within'.

Phil Rickman's Candlenight (1991) is an appropriate example to explore the problematic nature of British national identity and the understanding of 'otherness'. Inspired by a radio documentary that explores the socio-political circumstances in the mid-1980s when many English, metropolitan incomers were buying cheap land in Wales and increasing the property prices, the novel tells the tale of an extreme Welsh nationalist secret society murdering the English immigrants who seemingly corrupt their traditional, pastoral town. Rickman explains that what inspired the documentary and the novel was the strong feeling of invasion that the Welsh felt and subsequently how unaccepted and un-welcomed the English (or the metropolitan 'incomers') were (see Jones 2002). Apart from the problems within British identity (e.g.

conflicts between English and Welsh), what we can also observe in Candlenight is opposition and conflicts between rural and urban. This polarisation signifies the themes pastoralism and anti-pastoralism that are intrinsic to the analysis of *The League* and form the basis of the chapters on location and character (*chapter five and six*).

Williams (1985), Wiener (1981), Paxman (1998), Higson (2006) and Clapson (2007) point to the traditional pastoral view that refers to the English countryside as 'true England'. For example, Gibbs (1935) in England Speaks describes the country side as the 'heart and soul of England', and claims that the Industrial Revolution has 'destroyed true England'. This ideology stands for one side of the representations in popular imagination, as well as British film and television that embody the classic statement of the country-city opposition in which the countryside tends to represent tradition, stability, tranquility and past (Higson 2006). It is no coincidence that the notions of 'the heart of England' or 'true England' coincide with the Industrial Revolution and Second World War. These events seemed to be the core of uncertainties of the time creating anxieties, for instance in matters of national identity and gender. Faced with such uncertainties the idea of the traditional countryside provided "a sense of continuity with the national past" (Higson 2006: 242) as well as a hope and a reason to keep going through the war, people imagining a 'fantasy' space to go back to (Murphy 2009). A common understanding of the time was: "If there was an England worth fighting for, it seemed more likely to lie in the countryside – in what was left of England's green and pleasant land" (Murphy 2009: 227). This truly typical England of the rustic countryside usually resided with the domesticated South (Higson 2006: 242).

In the media texts that followed the pastoral view, modern society and industrialism signify the corruption of the country(side) and nature (Hutchings 2004). However, along with the pastoral 'essence' of the nation, threatened by modernity and urbanism, Hunt (2008) highlights the 'savage or beastly' landscape as another popular generic image of the countryside. In this 'savage rural tradition' representations of country folk were far from an idyllic social constancy and instead "revealed as decidedly primitive and altogether too close to nature, with rural traditions themselves involving a deeply unhealthy insularity and stasis" (Hutchings 2004: 35).

These discussions on the polarisation between rural and urban spaces need to be examined in the light of the social and economic changes that took place in the 20th and 21st centuries in Britain.

This approach points to a third conception, which is the annihilation of the urban and rural divide. During this period, a reverse immigration – country labourers moving to the cities to find work, and many urban middle-class dwellers moving into villages to pursue a rural dream – took place, which changed the social structure in both spaces (Clapson 2007) and blurred the traditional urban and rural division. These changes coincided with representations in media texts such as *Quatermass II* (BBC, 1955) that defuse clear distinctions between urban and rural. Hutchings (2004) explains, "One awful thing that can happen to the countryside happens in *Quatermass II*; it is invaded from outside by modernity. But *Quatermass II* also suggests another possibility, that something awful is already in the countryside, that nature itself has the capacity to be threatening" (34–5). The different approaches to urban and rural division explored here are also evident in the representations of *The League*.

3.2.2 *English Horror History & Complications and Complexities in Horror*

This section explores the strain between the realist tradition and horror genre, and the prejudice against horror as a cultural product. Here the academic literature signifies horror's capacity to tap into topical issues and illuminate the deepest fears and anxieties of a society. Via specific examples from different decades, this section illustrates how genre conventions as well as content and interpretations of narratives were influenced by the shifts in the nature of social fears and anxieties.

Relevant to this research, Badley (1995), Showalter (1992) and Kimbrell's (1993) arguments suggest that the 1990s were mostly dominated by growing anxieties about our bodies and sexual identity, which were implanted in ambiguity and excess – two notions that lie at the heart of English Gothic. We observe the emergence of the 'new' body that provides a space where viewers can reinvent, re-identify and re-imagine themselves. Linked to the argument in *Britain on Screen* that suggests the 1990s ended with deeper social and cultural anxieties, this section points to growing un-

certainties and society's attempts to normalise, define, identify and/or understand it.

The first horror boom in British cinema started off in the mid-1950s and ended by mid-1970s. During this period two companies, Hammer Studios and Amicus House of Horror, had particular significance as they revolutionised the national horror circuit. Their works and the themes they inhabit were immensely inspirational for their contemporaries as well as future productions such as *The League*. These works on the one hand embodied the overarching themes of Gothic tradition and English attitudes while creating their own styles. Hammer Studios with their 1954 production *Quatermass Xperiment* (Hammer, 1955), which was an adaptation of a popular BBC thriller *Quatermass Experiment* (BBC, 1953) started a revolution in British horror film. Amicus, on the other hand, furthered the revolution by introducing a new and fresh perspective to British horror during the 1960s and 1970s especially by its portmanteau/anthology films (Hutchings 2002; Pirie 2008).

Before this era, however, we observe a reluctance in creating horror texts in England. The low number of horror texts produced in England before the 1950s can be interpreted through two different perspectives: the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC)'s heavy censorship (Conrich 2002) and a favouritism towards 'realist' material (see Cooke 2003; Pirie 2008). Conrich (2002) argues that the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC)'s heavy censorship, and restricting ratings/classifications was a significant factor in the British genre's slow development. The 'H' rating – an advisory classification, stands for 'horrific' is especially important in understanding horror film in Britain in the 1930s. The term 'horrific' was so widely used that it appears as if there were no 'horror' films during this period (Conrich 2002).

The second aspect, prejudice against horror genre, however proves more fruitful in our understanding of horror's relation with culture and national identity. Contemporaneous genres the 1960s realist texts (the kitchen sink movement) and Hammer horrors provide an interesting example. During this period, while the 'kitchen-sink' movies were associated with positive values and deemed authentic, horror films were linked to moral panics and deemed vile (Pirie 2008). Realist dramas, especially BBC's social realist single-plays, were regarded as symbols of quality TV drama, typified as progressive and original, and acknowledged as places to reflect, analyse and critique the state of society (Cooke 2003). Yet, Cooke (2003), Grixti (1989), Bourke

(2005), Jones (2002) and Badley's (1995) arguments signify horror's capacity to tap into topical themes and issues; underline their popularity and acknowledge them as platforms for serious discussion just like realist dramas. Nigel Kneale's works such as *Quartermass* is a good representative of such popular, original and inventive texts. *Quartermass* was not only progressive but also challenged the understanding and conventions of realism and explored the theme anti-pastoralism. For instance, the opening scene can be seen as a critique of middle class domesticity, and its nostalgia about the countryside and the past where the classic rural image is disrupted by the prime symbol of sci-fi, the space ship (Pirie 2008; Leggott 2008a).

Grixti furthers the discussions on horror's place within a culture and society and the genre's functions. For Grixti (1989), horror texts' significance lies in the way "they form part of the symbolic structures which we use to make sense of and ascribe meaning to our existence" (xii), no matter what their merits or broadcast medium may be. They are "a type of narrative which deals in messages about fear and experiences associated with fear" (xii), these fears often being latent. Thus horror fictions reflect and explore boundaries of a culture as well as the ambiguities and uncertainties embedded in it (Grixti 1989; Cooke 2003). However, the nature of social fears and anxieties are influenced by and shift according to the circumstances of the time (Grixti 1989; Bourke 2005). This influences genre conventions as well as content and interpretations of narratives. For instance, many 20th century media texts follow a continuing trend of the representations of science and fear, linked to the continuing anxieties in the society about science and technology (Jones 2002). However, as the sources of fear change, the themes the texts tackle with change as well.

Jones charts the changes in the fears in each decade and their relation with horror fictions created in those periods. Accordingly, in the 1920s and 1930s, with Darwinist evolutionary theory's impact on popular imagination, horror texts were exploring evolutionary themes of men and ape as in *King Kong* (1933). The texts in the 1940s, such as *Dr Renault's Secret* (1942) furthered this and included scientists in plots, portraying "scientists seeking to interpose themselves into the scheme of evolution by creating humans from apes" (Jones 2002: 51). The 1950s saw the emergence of radiation-mutation horrors, technophobic narratives, due to nuclear fears. There was also an emergence of invasion narratives due to Cold War Paranoia. From the 1960s onwards zombification became very common with a wide portrayal of ex-

posure to forms of radiation and pollution (Jones 2002). Particularly in the English context, in the 1970s the invasion and zombification narratives came to signify fears about loss of English national identity and anxieties about immigration. During this period, Jones argues that the "paranoid English imperial fantasies of invasion" that are observed in the 18th century transformed into "post-imperial realities of multi-cultural life, particularly in urban centres" (2002: 150).

In terms of horror's role, Badley (1995) explains that psychoanalytic criticism perceives horror as displaced, 'safe' pornography, as its conventions become "fetishistic substitutes for the objects of sexual fears and desires" (2). Taking a psychoanalytic perspective, Twitchell (1985) suggests horror films to be cautionary tales and rites of passage for adolescents, covertly demonstrating the dangers of incest. For Twitchell, horror texts, on the one hand, emphasise social taboos while providing safe outlets for sexual energy and anxiety. However, Badley (1995) argues the emergence of a new hype in the mid-1980s, which she refers to as 'post-modern horror', surpasses repressed sexuality. Here sexual terror "has become part of a much larger anxiety about gender, identity, morality, power, and loss of control ..." (Badley 1995: 14). Badley sees horror's function as reflecting excess and ambiguity in which the body becomes the main site of expression, and introduces the concept 'the body fantastic'. Here, the fantastic is not a symptom of psychosexual dysfunction as defined by Freud but a symptom of socioeconomic and cultural malaise.

Thompson (2007) addresses Kierkegaard's notion of apocalyptic dread, in her study exploring how Hollywood movies depict apocalyptic anxieties: "...fear refer to something definite, whereas anxiety [dread] is freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility" (cited in 17). Thus, Kierkagaardian understanding illustrates the dread of the unknown (Grixti 1989; Thompson 2007). It places the concept of not determined object – uncertain, ambiguous, undefined – and the existence of endless possibilities at the locus of anxieties. For example, in the context of *The League* (see TV series Christmas Special), it is not homophobia that is at the centre of social anxiety; thus it is not the 'fear' of a homosexual man, but the ever-changing nature of a man's sexual identity. It's the unknown, the uncertainty of what 'he' may become in any given time – the vagueness, non-established sexual nature – that creates uneasiness and anxiety. A similar theme is also observed in the characters Barbara, the transsexual taxi driver, as well as Iris and Judee (see *chapter six* and *seven*). Closely

linked to the dread of the unknown, Badley (1995) explains that new horror films "reflect our saturation with sexual images and options, a state of cultural hyperconsciousness, confusion, and terror" (13). Kimbrell (1993) underlines that although this aggression towards the body, which modern horror represents, is 'not new', it is 'different from the past', "It's not just that modern technology has increased the rate and expanded the manner of our aggression toward our bodies, but also that we are alienated from them as never before" (57). Yet, with the "powerlessness against environment, people started to change what they have power over – their bodies" and that "the material body continues to signify unity, wholeness, identity, and humanity even as 'the body' as a concept becomes increasingly unstable" (Badley 1995: 28). Respectively, for Badley, horror fictions, through the representations of 'the fantastic body,' provide a solution for deeper crisis, an outlet for re-imagining the self.

Expanding our understanding of the end of 1990s, Showalter (1992) argues that, "The ends of centuries seem not only to suggest but to intensify crises..." (2). Thus, it is in this fin de siecle experience of intensified confusion and terror – where sexuality becomes the main site of terror – that strong urges and attempts to define and identify certain concepts emerge. This discussion on the heightened crisis at the end of centuries, can be linked to the emergence of a new horror boom at the end of the 1990s (Pirie 2008). This also makes the broadcast year of *The League* TV series season one (1999) more meaningful. The key notions discussed here – ambiguity, excess, grotesque, irrationality and anxieties – on the one hand remind us how the ideas introduced by Gothic writers are still deeply embedded in the English consciousness (Pirie 2008) and on the other hand demonstrate that the shifts in anxieties are linked to the changing context that seem to heightened these anxieties in the 1990s. These arguments draw to our attention that that *The League*, as a nineties text, embodies these notions of uncertainty, ambiguity, dread, heightened crisis, excess and grotesqueness.

3.2.3 *20th Century English Comedy History*

Similar to the examination of English horror, it is important to map out English comedy history for a thorough understanding of the essence of the comedy style(s) and its functions, as well as its significance and relation to the cultural context. This

will be useful in understanding the images, themes and styles embodied within *The League*. The examination here is a chronological outlook on the 20th Century, ending with the 1990s cycle. Similar to horror, comedy is a cultural product and a social practice that is both shaped by the context it is created in and contributes to it. While comedy texts adapt to their own time, they are also a part of their ancestry. The literature suggests that within this long-running tradition each cycle tried to create its own stamp while simultaneously sharing roots with its predecessors (see Rodway 1975; Medhurst 2007). This framework is key in reading *The League*. The set of themes that seem to persist through time are absurdity and the grotesque – while their degree of harshness tend to change. A significant aspect here is the existence of a regional and geographic divide, a theme that was observed in British history, social realist texts and horror traditions.

Wilmut (1982) divides 20th Century English comedy history until the 1980s, into three principle styles: the first being music hall comedians that dominated the years up to WWII, followed by the 'NAAFI comedians' (Navy, Army and Airforce Institute) who first gained experience during the war, which furthered their careers in post-war civilian life, and the third wave being the university comedians.

Medhurst (2007) describes music hall as "the motherlode of English popular comedy" (61), and "Britain's first fully commercialised entertainment industry" (64). While Medhurst (2007) charts its characteristics as "often vibrantly vulgar, testing the limits of censorship and questioning the stranglehold of 'decency'..." (66), Wilmut and Rosengard (1989) point to a strong sense of satire. Even after the decline of music hall, this style has been "substantially modified by television" (Palmer 1988: 95). World War I and II had significant implications on the music hall tradition and comedy in general. With the WWI, music hall transformed into variety and with WWII a whole new generation of entertainers emerged (Wilmut and Rosengard 1989). The success of light entertainment on wartime radio, led to its permanent position after the war (Palmer 1988). With the return of peace, the comics who worked during the war came to dominate the entertainment profession. Their comedy was sharper and more pungent than the pre-war variety tradition (Wilmut and Rosengard 1989). Some of the most acknowledged comics of this cycle are the surrealistic creators of *The Goon Show* (BBC Home Service, 1951–1960) and Tony Hancock.

While in the 1950s radio comedy seemed to break new ground by satirising, generally quite gently, current events and institutions, the emergence of "the university satirist" in the early 1960s created a new buzz (Palmer 1988: 100). This cycle, started off with the show *Beyond the Fringe* (opened at Lyceum Theatre, Edinburg on 22 August 1960), which was "a series of revue sketches performed by members of the Cambridge Footlights Club" (Palmer 1988: 100). These sketches ranged from "the satirically barbered to the plain silly" (Wilmut 1982: 21). This group's intentions were to observe what was going on around them, imitate them and remind the audience how absurd life is by shock of recognition (see Wilmut 1982). The cycle was dominated by students from Oxford and Cambridge stage revues who then vaulted on to radio and TV (Wilmut 1982). It was, then, with *Beyond the Fringe* the distinct techniques of this cycle, such as direct political satire, were established and came to dominate radio and television comedy for over twenty years (Wilmut and Rosengard, 1989). For instance, *Monty Python's* characteristics, such as lack of punch-lines, a feeling of stream-of-consciousness, parody of TV made on TV, use of shock and unconventionalism, had its roots in this comedy tradition, but also fostered originality (Wilmut 1982). This cycle came to have immense influence on the following generations and the general sense of humour (Palmer 1988), which can be traced in the League's works.

In the late 1970s we observe the emergence of a new style in London's Soho, the Comedy Sore, which came to be known as 'alternative comedy' (Palmer 1988). The common understanding is that the primary intention of these new comedians was to be significantly different from their predecessors. This, however, is itself a continuing thread in the story of British comedy since the birth of Victorian music hall (Wilmut and Rosengard 1989). This cycle was linked to the satirists of the 1960s and 1970s with their political motivation, however, the new comers "were so much cruder and more aggressive" (Palmer 1988: 101). Arguably, two of the most remarkable manifestations of the alternative cannon are *The Comic Strip Presents...* (Channel 4, 1982–2005), and *The Young Ones* (BBC2, 1982–4).

The 1990s comedy landscape is particularly important as it helps identify the common features among this cycle as well as the originality of *The League*. This decade saw the emergence of a new hype, which seemed to have elevated the crudeness and aggressiveness of the previous works. A new group of creatives, Chris Morris, Steve

Coogan, Armando Iannucci, and Stewart Lee to name a few, marked this decade by their new take on parody and satire (Thompson 2004). Among the key shows created in this decade such as *On the Hour* (BBC Radio 4, 1991–2), *I'm Alan Partridge* (BBC, 1997–2002) and *The Day Today* (BBC2, 1994), Morris's brainchild *Brass Eye* (Channel 4, 1997–2001) – a satire of typical television current affairs show – seems to stand out for its heightened excess, absurdity, grotesque, self-reflexive satire and innovation (see Mills 2007; Mulvey 2007). While the surreal and absurd elements give a nod to the Pythons, the political satire can be traced back to the 1950s comedy circuit. The show's radical attitude resides with the way it blurs fiction and fact by imposing fiction on real people, places and subjects, thus creating its own reality or perhaps replacing reality with its own creation rather than presenting it (Mulvey 2007: 13). The 1990s comedy circuit shares certain characteristics with horror texts of the time hence the shared social context, which are a heightened sense of ambiguity, absurd, excess, crudeness and grotesqueness.

It is important to note that the influence this cycle had on the following generations was not only through their comedic style, but also through their involvement in TV production and statuses as decision makers in the industry. These professionals went on to taking other roles in film and TV industries. For instance, as will be discussed under 'Processes' (*chapter four*), Steve Coogan along with Henry Normal created his own production company, Baby Cow Productions. With Coogan and Normal on the executive producer stand, the company has produced a number of popular comedy shows such as *The Mighty Boosh* (BBC, 2004–2007). Although *The Boosh*'s comedy style is not exactly like the 1990s harsh comedy, it shares certain elements with this cycle, as well as previous cycles such as surrealism. Coogan, for instance, may not have directly created this show or influenced its style or narrative, yet he certainly created an outlet for upcoming artists to produce their own works.

Examining the English comedy history through a different perspective, Hunt (2008) points to a shift from 'alternative' comedy to 'post-alternative' comedy. While political satire was one of the main elements in the former one, the latter rarely uses satire for social criticism. Hunt also notes that this shift seems to be a socio-geographic one, "While [a] number of alternative comedians had northern backgrounds, 1980s' comedy manifested a metropolitan antipathy towards the 'north'. Provincial and bigoted, the north was equated with mother-in-law jokes, racism, homophobia and

bingo" (23). In this respect, alternative comedy embodied a 'Southern' perspective in which Northern culture seemed to be bland, an assumption that post-alternative comedy came to challenge. Hunt (2008) argues:

> While post-alternative comedy is diverse, it did encompass a new region-alism in which the north was prominent. An important bridge between the alternative comedy of the 1980s and the new comedy of the 1990s was the comic Viz (1979-). Like the alternative comedians, Viz was con-frontational and violent, but it was also aggressively regional and rather less politically aligned. Full of north-east slang and prodigiously filthy, it could be puerile and lairy as often as it was cuttingly satirical. (23)

Hunt's argument underlines the relevance of the geographic polarisation for English comedy, which has particular significance for the League – a group of four northern writers creating a comedy show set in the north of England about northern characters (see *chapter five* and *six*). The discussions above suggest that some of the complex texts of the 1990s blended different approaches: a sense of vulgarity and the grotesque that can be traced all the way back to music hall, the absurdity that we observe in the 1960s cycle, the aggressiveness of the alternative canon and a new kind of regionalism where the North seems to dominate.

3.2.4   *Comedy of Embarrassment: The Role of the Comic*

The next two sections focus on the function of comedy and explore the complexities in defining the role of the comic. The key aspects here are: pleasure derived from dealing with taboo subjects, inclusive and exclusive trades of comedy, comedy as a relief of tension and comedy as a source of anxiety. These four concepts are intrinsic to the style of comedy *The League* nurtures (see *chapter five*, *six* and *seven*). This section particularly focuses on the English context and illustrates the relationship between comedy and English culture. It emphasises that comedy offers great insight into a culture, national identity and individual identification – "how, where and why people place themselves" (Medhurst 2007: 39). This brings us to the first two roles of comedy that are listed above: pleasure driven from taboo subjects and the idea of belonging and exclusion. Through the topic of sexuality this section explores

comedy of embarrassment that reflects the co-existence of pleasure and discomfort, as well as the divisive and collective role of comedy.

Sexuality is, arguably, the commonest topic of humour in Britain, which is also evident in *The League* (see *chapter six*). This notion offers two pathways, a) the "humorous delight in breaking the taboos of mentioning the unmentionable…" (Palmer 1988: 99), b) the co-existence of pleasure and discomfort embedded in sexual frustration, a significant element of comedy of embarrassment (Wilmut 1982; Hunt 2008). Especially the second pathway is intrinsic to English comedy and culture as, for example, Paxman (1998) describes the English as "having hot-water bottles instead of a sex life" (1).

The notion of embarrassment is linked to Neale and Krutnik's understanding of 'dramatic intimacy'. For Neale and Krutnik (1990) broadcast comedy, and television in general, "are concerned with reaffirming cultural identity, with demarcating an 'inside', a community of interest and values, and localising contrary or oppositional values as an 'outside'" (242). The idea here is that people derive pleasure from the humiliation of an outsider, who then becomes an object of social mockery (Gray 2005). This is related to the superiority theory, which suggests that humour arises from a 'sudden glory' felt when one recognises his/her supremacy over others (Mills 2001). This assumption locates aggressive feelings at the centre of humour (Smuts 2009). According to this understanding, laughter reinforces power positions (Mills 2001). This brings us to the divisive and/or collective role of comedy and the notions of belonging and exclusion (Medhurst 2007). The other side of this is embarrassment, a sense of guilt for speculating and a sense of discomfort for observing (im)moral attitudes (Gray 2005: 149). These assertions suggest that feelings of pleasure and discomfort co-exist. This is also a key concept that the League's writers employ (see for instance, Dyson 2000; Gatiss 2011b) .

Wilmut (1982), Hunt (2008) and Dyson (2000) refer to Alan Bennett as one of the most significant and influential names deploying this style of comedy. Examining Bennett's works, Dyson (2000) notes the co-existence of comedy and horror, as well as sadness and humour in this type of comedy, and points to the presence of "a different kind of horror" that is the "horror of social discomfort and embarrassment" (2), which seems to be an intrinsic part of English comedy. Looking at Bennett's TV Plays *Talking Heads* (BBC 1988 / 1998) Dyson (2000) explains, "… these plays

were funny. They shouldn't have been since they were about people dying (Intensive Care), or loneliness (A Woman of No Importance) or the mentally ill (Our Winnie), but somehow the combination of discomfort and pathos only emphasised the jokes" (2).

These arguments point towards a link between comedy and horror, especially in an English context, where comedy comes across as a different kind of horror and embodies anxieties, a sense of discomfort, irrationality and polarisation. The next section explores this connection in detail through the concepts of absurdity and the grotesque.

3.2.5 *Grotesque & Absurdity: The Role of the Comic*

This section explores the concepts of the grotesque and absurdity, and charts their relation to horror and comedy. It illustrates the co-existence of horror and comedy, as well as the paradoxical roles of the comic in which horrific, ludicrous, discomfort, pleasure, anxiety and ambiguity tend to coincide. This account is discussed in the context of *The League* in *chapter five*.

Bakhtin's notion of Rabelisian carnival is intrinsic to our understanding of the relationship between grotesque, English national humour and horror (see Thompson 1982; Medhurst 2007). Bakhtin points to a form of struggle against fear in mankind, which can be observed in even the most ancient images of folklore (Thompson 1982). He refers to this struggle as 'cosmic terror'. For Bakhtin "[t]he images reflecting this struggle are often interwoven with images of a parallel struggle in the individual body against memories of an agonising birth and the fear of the thrones of death", yet "[t]his cosmic terror is more essential and stronger than individual bodily fear of destruction..." (cited in Thompson 1982: 43). Bakhtin defines cosmic terror to be "the heritage of man's ancient impotence in the presence of nature" (cited in Thompson 1982: 43), and underlines that it is through the human body, that anxieties about cosmic terror are presented. These bodily images that reflect such fears are identified as grotesque imagery (see Steig 1970; Thompson 1982).

From Bakhtin's description of the grotesque, then we need to sketch out what the grotesque body is and what it signifies. Linked to the anxieties emerging from man's

impotence against nature, the grotesque body relates to the body as a whole and the limits of this whole – the confines between the body and the world, and between separate bodies (Bakhtin cited in Thompson 1982: 42). Bakhtin identifies the bowels, genital organs, nose and mouth to be the features that have the most significant role in the transgression of bodily confines (Thompson 1982). The grotesque body is never complete and tends to be in a constant transformation – a state of becoming. It is through these four organs, that take the leading role in grotesque imagery, that the body outgrows itself. This is reflected in the way these organs are predominantly subject to positive exaggeration and hyperbolisation (Bakhtin cited in Thompson 1982: 42). This, on the one hand, coincides with Badley (1995) and Thompson's (2007) arguments on dread and anxiety, and endless transformation and uncertainty, in horror genre (and their relationship to anxieties about sexuality, identity, gender and the body). On the other hand it is also linked to the image of the body in comedy – with bodily wit, exaggeration, vulgarity, disregard for boundaries, upheaval of misbehaviour and sexual frustration, which are significant elements of British comedy (see Palmer 1988; Medhurst 2007). The grotesque body plays a crucial role in analysing *The League*'s characters (see *chapter six*).

This brings us to the relation of horror and comedy to grotesque imagery. Steig (1970) notes that the grotesque can be defined neither as purely horrific nor as comic, as it embodies both these terms. For instance, Ruskin suggests the grotesque to be "a combination of the fearful and the ludicrous", and Jennings argues that "These seemingly contradictory tendencies are combined in the phenomenon itself and the mechanism of their combination is the key to its understanding" (cited in Steig 1970: 255). Analysing the role of the comic in this equation, Steig (1970) notes that in the definition of grotesque the comic can be both a means to defeat anxiety in the face of ambiguity and the inexplicable (the examination of horror suggested that anxieties are created by uncertainties), as well as a source of anxiety. This, then, highlights the two paradoxical roles of comedy and reveals the complexities and complications on the subject.

The idea of the inexplicable links to absurdity. Examining the roots of horror reveals that irrationality, surrealism and absurdity are key aspects of the gothic tradition. Rodway (1975) and Palmer (1987) underline that comedy in general is associated with absurdity, yet also point to a distinct preoccupation with the absurd in

British culture. The examination of 20th century comedy history illustrated this notion as it pointed out the presence of absurdity in different cycles from *The Goon Show*, *Monty Python*'s *Flying Circus*, *The Young Ones* to *Brass Eye*. It is safe to suggest that absurdity and nonsense are among the most popular forms of humour in Britain (Palmer 1988). Finally, finding the moral and absurdity in human behaviour, that would normally arouse pity, horror or amusement (Rodway 1975), highlights the co-existence of comedy and horror, and the paradoxical nature of comedy where pleasure and discomfort coincide. The elements that were discussed under the headings "Comedy of Embarrassment" and "Grotesque and Absurdity" help us understand 1990s comedy texts that seem to embody these aspects. For example, *The League*'s style was formed by connecting horror (thus gothic) and comedy (see *chapter five*).

3.3 Conclusion

The examination of the state of Britain, as well as the history of British social realism, English Gothic and English comedy traditions provides the foundation necessary for analysing *The League as* a comedy, horror and drama hybrid. The themes and images that dominate this chapter found their way into the League's creations – their representations of small northern towns (Spent and Royston Vasey) and their inhabitants (*chapter five* and *six*).

This chapter, through a chronological examination, established that British social realist, horror and comedy texts are social texts, which reveal something about British culture. It also established that these texts are social texts of their day, which carry their history in them. Although horror texts, for instance, usually embody characteristics of a particular era, their origins can be traced back to the Gothic literature tradition. Similarly, although over the years British comedy and British social realism went through stylistic shifts, we can still observe the influence of history on the way they have developed.

The examination of the state of Britain from the seventies to the noughties, and the social realist texts of this period revealed regional and geographical divides, as well as marginalised people and marginalised spaces as key themes, and images of waste-

lands and de-industrialisation of the north of England as key images. As *chapter five* and *chapter six* illustrate, these themes are highly relevant for *The League*.

The chapter demonstrated that horror and comedy texts have the ability to simultaneously express, explore and challenge latent social fears and anxieties on subjects such as national identity. Similar to the section on social realist drama and the state of Britain, regional and geographic divides have great significance both for understanding British and English culture as well as national styles of horror and comedy. This divide, in other words the notion of 'Other Within', provides us with the concepts of pastoralism and anti-pastoralism, as well as regional comedy styles such as 'northern comedy', that are key to the analysis of *The League*.

The exploration of 1990s texts, comedy, horror and social realist history, as well as the social, cultural, economic and political context of Britain, all point to an assumed 'end-of-century' crisis and a deeper sense of anxiety — expressed particularly in national and personal identities, covering issues from sexuality, North-South divide and the complex relationship between urban and rural spaces and cultures. Especially, the comedy and horror hybrids of this time embodied a sense of grotesque, vulgarity, a new kind of regionalism and absurdity. These discussions inform our understanding of *The League*.

The exploration of English Gothic argued that the emotions and ideas created during this period are embedded in English horror as well as other aspects of English culture and everyday life. This is a significant argument that helps unpack *The League*'s style, its representations, production and reception. An important theme to look for is 'the gothic in everyday life'. The exploration of comedy highlighted the paradoxical nature of the genre where pleasure and discomfort seem to co-exist. This drew forth the concepts comedy of embarrassment, absurdity and the grotesque that are highly relevant for the analysis in *chapters five*, *six* and *seven*. This sub-chapter also established that horror and comedy share several characteristics. This connection is significant in analysing the League's style as it hybridises these two genres.

The next chapter contextualises production processes. It underlines the necessity of taking production and receptions practices and contexts into consideration in analysing texts. It links understanding social texts, their meanings and statuses to the

examination of their creation processes. These two chapters form the framework of this research – the significance of combining textual analysis with production studies.

4

CONTEXTS: PROCESSES

This chapter focuses on the theme of creative processes. It substantiates some of the essential structures of this thesis: a) the need for de-centering texts and creating a study that revolves around textual analysis, study of media organisations and creative processes as well as the wider contexts, b) the significance of a discursive approach that combines all three layers of analysis, c) the significance of a bottom-up approach for achieving a more rounded macro study (see Cottle 2003; Mittell 2004). While *Social Texts* (*chapter three*) signified the connection between texts and social, cultural, political and economic contexts, this chapter completes the cycle of interactions by examining the TV industry and creative processes in Britain from the 1970 to 2000 – focusing on the BBC – as well as theoretical discussions on culture production.

As a chapter that binds together the key arguments and maps the field of study (media production) that the thesis belongs to, *Processes* offers the background that is crucial for answering all three research questions:

How did the creation process of *The League of Gentlemen* develop?

How does the television production ecology work within the BBC with particular reference to *The League of Gentlemen* as a case study?

How did the "special moments" in television, such as *The League of Gentlemen*, emerge in the BBC during the 1990s, a decade that is considered to be "infertile" by some researchers (i.e. Born 2004)?

4.1 examines the broadcasting climate in Britain from the 1970s to the end of the 1990s and traces the changes forged by the wider political and economic context. Importantly, it explores the impacts of these macro level changes on the meso and micro levels of production: the BBC as a media organisation, television production and all its elements – e.g. organisational structures and strategies, work ethos, professional

roles and relationships, creative autonomy and output. The analysis illustrates the relationship between the commissioning and production processes and the cultural, economic and political contexts. It also examines various micro-instances in specific productions. In doing so the chapter outlines the complexities in television production. It highlights that macro elements do not have complete influence over all other elements in media production and indicates that there are other aspects such as individual input, which influence creative processes and texts. This signifies the need for a discursive approach in which the micro study takes the lead.

4.2 offers a discussion of theories relevant to culture production and creative industries, and furthers the key themes that emerge from 4.1. It focuses on the tension between economic measures and artistic vision, and demonstrates the complexities in media production – defining media organisations, creative processes, and professional relationships through negotiation, mutual adjustment, conflict and struggle.

Together these two sub-chapters establish the significance of a bottom up approach for achieving a more rounded macro study, and justify one of the main goals of this thesis -a fully rounded understanding of the 1990s BBC production ecology through a detailed study of *The League*. This chapter draws to a close with 4.3 by setting out *The League'*s production context, providing the foundations for its analysis.

In conjunction the historical exploration of the UK broadcasting environment, and the BBC's organisational structure, culture and output, the examination of the specific production processes as well as the theoretical discussions on media production help us to:

- Pinpoint changes and continuities in the production ecology of the BBC through the years.
- Examine people's perceptions on how creativity has been managed within the Corporation in different time periods.
- Illustrate whether the 1990s was a period of crisis in the BBC.
- Pinpoint what is typical and what is unorthodox within the making of *The League*.
- Identify how 'special moments' in TV occur.
- Determine the different factors that influence production processes.
- Demonstrate why *The League* is what it is.

4.1   TV Industry & Production in Britain from the 1970s to the Beginning of the 2000s

This sub-chapter, following the discussion of the portrayal of Britain on screen from the late 1970s throughout the 1990s, traces the changes in the TV industry itself as well as the impacts of these changes on output. Important work in this category includes that by Cottle (2003), O'Malley (1994), Goodwin (1998), Blumler (1991) and Born (2004), to name just a few. What their studies suggest is that a complex combination of factors: the technological, organisational, financial, and political, "forced their [broadcasting system's] architects to re-examine and redeploy their resources" (Blumler 1991: 194). Goodwin (1998) distinguishes four general forces that triggered this shift in television: the economic, the social and cultural, the technological and the political, and he lists the latter as the decisive one allowing the rest "to enter the breach and demonstrate their mettle on television systems" (8). Closely related to *research question two* that focuses on how the production ecology works, these arguments help us understand the influence of the macro context on the meso and micro levels of production. It is crucial to have a good understanding of this new broadcasting climate that emerged in the 1980s to understand how *The League of Gentlemen* emerged (*research question one*), how the professional climate worked, and other factors that impinged the show's creation process. The examination of the 1980s and 1990s broadcasting climate will be useful to analysing the show, allowing us to explore in detail, for example, the development of the textual aspects such as location, character and narrative, the roles of the professionals who were involved as well as the reasons behind certain professional practices. *4.1* also helps answer the *third research question* that tackles the idea of 'golden ageism' and how ground-breaking works emerge. The historical examination in this section is important for understanding the perceptions of the BBC's broadcasting environment and the way production ecology works.

The discussion starts off with an account of how the wave of transition, that started in the 1980s with the new broadcasting initiatives, crystallised in the 1990s and forged changes in the broadcasting environment (at the macro, meso and micro level) influencing the BBC's organisational strategies and structures, cultural milieu,

workplace relationships, professional roles, production atmospheres, thus the kind of programmes that were made and how they were made.

The arguments indicate that during this period the BBC transformed into a more market-led organisation in which quality programming was still the priority. However, they also suggest that creation of quality increasingly derived from financial concerns rather than artistic criteria (see Barnett and Curry 1994; Goodwin 1998; Kung-Shankleman 2000). The reviewed literature notes an emergence of a managerial culture, an increase in the managerial staff and decrease in the number of creative personnel, a tightening hierarchy within the organisation, the introduction of 25% quota for commissioning programming from the independent sector, and a casualisation of employment (see Kung-Shankleman 2000; Born 2002; Hendy 2007).

At one end of the spectrum, according to some commentators, this led to a decrease in creative freedom of programme makers, forged a 'negative' work environment within the BBC in house production departments, and created a competitive environment which forged an inclination towards tried and tested formulas in all departments including comedy and drama (see Born 2004). This, especially in the 1990s, was recognised as a new kind of revolution within the BBC as its production culture started to change. Presumably this was a breaking point for quality and progressive programme making at the BBC. However, while these changes in the BBC's production culture are widely acknowledged there are other accounts that suggest such claims represent a sense of 'golden ageism' and offer a one sided view (see Wilmut 1982; Day-Lewis 1998).

Throughout *4.1* discussions of these changes are illustrated by some micro instances from three different BBC productions – *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, *Boys from the Blackstuff* and *Our Friends in the North*. There are two reasons for the choice of these works: their creative processes are documented in detail and they are all considered as 'breakthroughs' of their time. Thus, they help us understand how breakthroughs are achieved in different time periods (*research question three*). The examples from the commissioning and production stages of these shows reveal how macro forces are inscribed, managed and creatively negotiated by media professionals through their practices, in these organisational settings, and in the production of distinctive and changing cultural forms (Cottle 2003). They also illustrate the appropriateness of the bottom-up approach to studying the complex nature produc-

tion ecologies adopted by this thesis – a point also emphasised by Mittell (2004) and Cottle (2003).

The key theme in this chapter is the comparison of the 1960s (arguably the 'heyday' of BBC programme-making) and the 1980s and 1990s broadcasting climate, the prejudice towards series and serials and their potential, the benefits of a competitive environment, independent companies and what they can offer, the opportunities that were opened up to new creatives and the innovative programmes that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. This examination reveals that changes at the BBC were not as straightforward and sudden as some observers would have us believe. It illustrates the complexities in media production, and suggests a tendency to romanticise the past. It also suggests that it is wrong to infer a period of total impairment from a macro level analysis without examining micro practices, indicating that during these years creative programming continued through the adaptive practices of professionals who worked within and through the BBC's new broadcasting system, and what may be considered creative and financial restrictions, to create ground-breaking programming.

4.1.1 *The Beginning of the Second Phase of Television & the Transition from the 1970s to the 1980s*

Goodwin (1998) terms the period between the 1940s through to the second half of the 1970s as the 'first wave' of television, which had a well established and relatively stable pattern of organisation, yet marks the end of the 1970s as the beginning of a change, the beginning of the second phase in television. According to O'Malley (1994) and Goodwin (1998), the second phase of television coincides with major changes in the political and economic agenda under the Conservative governments of 1979–1997. As discussed in *Britain on Screen*, Thatcherism was responsible for vast changes in British society that affected every aspect of British life including television and the BBC (Cooke 2003).

Writers, such as McNair (1996), Blumler (1992), Goodwin (1998), Hendy (2007), Kung-Shankleman (2000) and Born (2002) underline that under the Conservative leadership there was a fundamental change in political attitudes towards public ser-

vice organisations in general, which is described as hostile. These writers stress that among these organisations, the BBC in particular attracted a lot of attention (see also Birt 2002: 306).

Kung-Shankleman (2000) suggests that "For many Conservative politicians the BBC had long exhibited the worst sins of British business: complacency, excessive trade union power, weak management and inadequate entrepreneur spirit" (2000: 75). For these reasons, as Hendy (2007) indicates, the Tories believed that the BBC was "structurally—perhaps pathologically—[was] unable to embrace the new era of privatization, free markets, consumer sovereignty, and choice" (281), and thus needed to be restructured. The BBC was heavily criticised by government officials and right-wing, populist media organisations for biased news coverage, as well as for being "unaccountable, inefficient, incompetent, self-serving and secretive" (Born 2002: 69) (see also Birt 2002). These accusations, in turn, influenced popular imagination and public opinion. This, topped with the increasing number of operators caused a major decline in the BBC's ratings (see Hendy 2007: 283). These circumstances put the organisation in a position where it needed to justify its existence more than ever, to legitimise its funding (the universal licence fee), its structure, mission and strategy (see Born 2002; Hendy 2007).

In 1985 the conservative government appointed the Peacock Committee (1985–6) to investigate the financing of the BBC and the possibility of privatisation and commercialisation of the organisation. Although the Peacock committee report decided against the BBC carrying advertising, nevertheless, it proposed – and subsequently got accepted- that both the BBC and the ITV be required to commission at least 25 per cent of their programming from independent producers, since they were assumed to be lacking financial discipline in the sector's comfortable duopoly. For Kung-Shankleman (2000), this report was a turning point in UK media policy as it replaced the primacy of creative criteria with financial and competitive conventions in the constitution of quality programming. This meant that quality programming was still the number one goal, yet it would be achieved through economic measures, such as forming a competitive sector via independent producers and lowering production costs rather than focusing on creative concerns.

Government pressure was also internalised as the Board of Governors, which the Prime Minister appointed, interfered more with the inner workings of the Corpora-

tion (Hendy 2007). This included the appointment of Michael Checkland as Director-General in 1987, and John Birt as Deputy Director-General in charge of news and current affairs, who was promoted to Director-General in 1993 (Crisell 1997: 233) (see also Birt 2002). By the end of the1980s, the BBC had been transformed into a more commercially minded corporation, which was much more affected by the market and market principles than ever before (see Barnett and Curry 1994; Goodwin 1998; Cooke 2003; Born 2004).

4.1.2   *The 1990s Political & Broadcasting Context: 'The Birt revolution'*

The transition from Checkland to Birt marks a significant time in the history of the BBC – its structural and cultural transformation. Hendy (2007) explains that under Checkland "the BBC quietly but effectively tightened its belt without too many howls of pain from inside" (284). However, as Hendy indicates, this 'quiet efficiency' did not satisfy the government's hunger for radical changes, thereby, the outright 'revolution' came with Birt. Birt (2002) notes that in the beginning of the new decade the pressure for reform was intensified. For example, on one occasion the BBC Chairman Hussey described the situation as 'do-or-die' and noted that they needed solid proof of how the BBC would sort itself out (cited in Birt 2002: 315). Birt (2002) describes Checkland as "an ancient, loving mechanic devoted to a clanging, hissing, outdated stream engine, keeping it going with a splash of oil, a bang of the hammer, a twist of the wrench" (308). Birt's accounts illustrate that he did not think that Checkland would bring radical solutions that the government sought. Replacing Checkland with Birt in 1993 demonstrated that Birt's opinion was shared by the government and the chairman (see Crisell 1997: 233; Birt 2002: 315–317).

In 1991 Checkland came up with an exercise called 'Funding the Future' to tackle waste and inefficiency and to release funds to invest in market levels of pay at the BBC (see Birt 2002, Hendy 2007). For Birt (2002), this initiative successfully raised BBC pay closer to market levels – through which the corporation was able to recruit and retain people of talent and ability – yet failed "to identify the scale of the BBC's inefficiency, and the reasons for it" (307). Birt (2002) describes this project as "a quick search for obvious and easily unearthable money" (307). He (2002) indicates that it became his task to turn the "obvious recommendations" of 'Funding the Future' such

as "the BBC should cut its television resource base – excess studios, outside broadcast vehicles, videotape-editing and so on, and the surplus staff who provided those services" into a "practical plan" (308–9). Consequently, Birt and his team recommended a new system called 'Producer Choice' to reorganise the Corporation. For Felix (2000), this system "marked the watershed between the old BBC and the new one and signalled the birth of a dynamic process of radical reforms, which amount to a revolution" (5). On 29 October 1991, Birt launched 'Producer Choice'. Two years later the system was fully adopted.

Felix (2000) explains that prior to this system, "the Corporate Centre held the budgets for all programmes, and channel controllers were allocated the money to fund programmes, based on their annual plan. At the time, a portion of the corporate budget was allocated to the funding of the resources departments…" (6). 'Producer Choice', however, acted as an internal market mechanism in which departments required operating as businesses and where "[b]oth programme-makers and facilities departments would face the full blast of market pressure" (Birt 2002: 313) (see Felix 2000). Birt (2002: 314) indicates that they knew that their approach would appeal to a Conservative government. He notes what he considered the benefits of the new system:

> 'Producer Choice' will bring clear information about the full total cost of our programmes, and about the precise cost of our resources. We will have unarguable information with which to persuade a sceptical world — and those who will scrutinise us keenly during the Charter Renewal process — that in a new era of Channel 3 publisher-contractors and a growing independent sector, the BBC is at least as efficient as any of its competitors. With 'Producer Choice', the jibes about bloated bureaucracy, over manning and the Indian Civil Service should end. (cited in Felix 2000: 7)

This new system then comes across as a respond to the Peacock Report and the new ideology which aimed to create a competitive sector, lower production costs, required efficiency gains, tighter budgeting, as well as evidence and detailed analysis of spending and cost of resources.

In 1994 "the Conservative government published a White Paper that required the BBC to expand into new media and to become more commercial, in order both to make up its financial shortfalls and to forge a bridgehead for British media into global markets" (Born 2002: 70). While this withdrew the direct threat of privatisation, it also established that "the BBC will not continue for ever in its present form" (cited inKung-Shankleman 2000: 76). Kung-Shankleman (2000) sketches out what this meant:

> The organisation would remain Britain's public service broadcaster and retain its current wide range of programming, offering choice for majority, minority and special groups. Its mission would continue as before, to inform, educate and entertain, and to reflect the national cultural identity and enrich it by sponsoring music, art and theatre. In addition, through long-term investment in production and training, it should play a leading role in developing nation's creative potential. At the same time, it would continue with its programme of radical reforms and change initiatives. Make further efficiency gains, and comply with tighter requirements to be introduced about feedback to parliament and the public. (76)

Born (2002) argues that such developments signified that the BBC was becoming an experimental site for the formation of a new culture of government, its neo-liberal ideology and monetarist economic policy, "in which notions of markets, efficiency, accountability and audit were translated into the public sector" (68), creating a culture of markets, audit and accountability within the BBC. These changes in the way the BBC dealt with financial and competitive measures forged further changes in its organisational culture, what Born (2002) describes as "a new corporate morality and rationality" (71).

Simon Gray's, an acclaimed dark comedy playwright, insights into one of the commissions illustrate a clear change in the broadcasting environment at the BBC. His accounts highlight that this transformation is not just about efficiency and prioritisation of economic concerns but about the formation of a different culture. In his diary, Gray (1995) recalls, "When I finally completed a film script that satisfied the BBC producer, the director of our choice and myself, were invited to an interview with the head of one of the drama departments" (16). Gray continues:

He (head of the department) said he liked the script a lot and so did his
script editor...The head of the department then came rolling around his
desk in his wheelchair...and proclaimed that these days it didn't matter
how good the script was, what they needed was stars, yes, stars...to put
bums on seats. ... The pleasant-faced script editor chipped in with some
blatantly capitalist affirmations of her boss's spiritually resonant posi-
tion – 'Get us some stars', she said, 'and we'll get the show on the screen'.
We left, the producer, the director and I, with the head of drama rolling
back behind his desk, the script editor smiling placidly at the thought of
another job done, another execution faultlessly executed. (1995: 16–17)

After the meeting, the director and the producer prepared a list of actors to pro-
pose, in Gray's words, "to the overlord and his script editor" (1995: 17), which sub-
sequently was accepted. Gray reveals that this incident was a breaking point for him:
"I gave up on the BBC, feeling that the BBC had given up on writers, and this one
in particular" (1995: 17). Gray describes the head of the department as "a com-
bination of school-master and Anglican minister" (1995: 16). Gray's portrayal of
the BBC executive points to the change in the occupational roles, as management
having distinct authority over the creative personnel, the writer, the producer and
the director, in terms of making creative decisions. This can be interpreted as the
rise of a new managerialism in the organisational structure, in which financial and
competitive measures seem to be given greater importance than artistic concerns.

The organisation's strategy and mission, too, was sculpted according to this new
managerialism. The BBC embodied a threefold mission: 'to unify a fragmenting so-
ciety', 'to complement commercial schedules', and 'to meet the needs of diverse au-
dience group' (Kung-Shankleman 2000: 97–98). Kung-Shankleman (2000) notes that
this framework consisted of "five strategic priorities derived from the government's
espoused goals for the organisation" (98), which can be listed as: innovative quality
programmes, efficiency, commercial activities, world development and, alliances and
partnerships. As Kung-Shankleman (2000) underlines, "Content has always been
the organisation's first priority and strategic goal number one" (98), however it is
striking that the all other strategic concerns are economic, which, again, signify the
changing context of the BBC.

4.1.3   *The Influences of the Changes in the Macro Context on the Middle-ground of Production*

The discussions up to here dealt with changes in the wider context (political and economic context as well as organisational structure, strategies and culture). It is also important to look at how these changes influenced the middle ground of media production – e.g. creative practices and work environment. The discussions here have great significance for *research question two* and *three* that focus on the production ecology within the BBC in which *The League* emerged. This section explores how 'Producer Choice' works in more detail, examining its goals and how it tries to achieve them. Understanding 'Producer Choice' is very important as *The League* radio and television series were created within this system (see *chapter five*). The accounts offered here a) illustrate the complexities of understanding how the new system influences creative practices and innovative output, and b) emphasise that it is insufficient to argue for total top-down creative impairment – especially without examining micro practices.

'Producer Choice' can be examined under two main headings: a) a system designed to eliminate the inefficiencies and 'excess capacity' within the organisation such as excess staff, unnecessary trips, flashy new equipment, etc. (Hendy 2007), and b) "a tariff-based programme funding model" aimed to scientise the production of programmes and the television and radio output according to the logic of financial planning (Born 2004: 306). Thus, this system aims to create quality programming by the logic of financial planning and be more efficient than the previous system. For example, the programme makers could be expected to choose the external services that offer the lowest price (Felix 2000: 6; Born 2002: 71–72).

In her ethnographic study of BBC production of news and current affairs, and drama during the 1990s, Born (2004) explores how this changing context influenced professionals' capacity for creative work and asked: "What was it like to work for the BBC in the later nineties?" (181). The meso level insights offered by the interviews in Born's study are useful for this thesis- e.g. what the professionals working under 'Producer Choice' were experiencing and what they thought about the changes. According to Born's analysis, the BBC adopted a new culture of employment that militated against creativity and innovative output because of anxieties and uncertainties produced by the casualisation of employment, the new organisational structure

(tightening the hierarchy and changing many occupational functions) as well as the new strategy that revolved around efficiency, marketing, accountancy, and audit.

Born (2004) explains casualisation of employment as a drift away from permanent staff and towards a reliance on short-term contracts and freelancing. Tunstall (1993) notes that freelance pattern became the predominant style of production, with the BBC following the lead of Channel 4 and ITV. Born (2004) identifies downsizing, department closures, redundancies, and outsourcing as the main features of this new employment culture. However, the striking point here is that while "staff producers and production-related craft workers became endangered species" (Born 2004: 181), there was a major increase in managerial personnel, such as accountants, lawyers, consultants, strategists, commercial managers, business analysts, marketers and market researchers (see also Hendy 2007). This, together with the quota for independent production, formed a competitive environment among the departments to get as many commissions as possible to be able to pursue in-house production and maintain permanent staff on board. For Born (2002), the competitive environment and the pressure to preserve in-house production and commissions forged a shift in the organisation's work ethos. Felix (2000) notes that the staff surveys that were conducted in 1993 and 1994, to find out what staff thought about the changes in the BBC, and how they felt about the BBC as a place to work, indicated a sense of cynicism. Some of the criticisms were lack of team work among senior managers, too much bureaucracy, poor leadership, low staff morale and poor communications (see Felix 2000: 19).

One of the major consequences of this was an inclination towards tried and tested formulas, which was observed both in comedy and dramas. For Day-Lewis (1998) the tendency to use popular formulas that are proven to attract audiences as blueprints and keep producing same kind of programmes rather than commissioning original work was a way to eliminate any chance of failure (see also Born 2002). Tunstall (1993) suggests that this formulae driven mindset was evident in the administration's approach to comedy and caused "fierce criticism and major resentment" (131). Tunstall explains:

> The same producer agreed with the widespread view that the best British comedy comes from the writer's personal vision and personal experience. There is a strongly-held belief that comedy should be more than a 'for-

mula'. The comedy should grow and develop in ways that appeal to the
writer. This, then, becomes a counter-formula; it is a comedy system that
honours not only the writer, but the writer's idiosyncrasies and oddball,
zany or eccentric humour. (1993: 127)

This broadcasting tradition of authored comedy which "honour(s) the sole writer
or comedy-partnership and allows the writer's creative instinct to play a very big part
in the comedy enterprise" (Tunstall 1993: 105) was then challenged by the compet-
itive market and the new strategy that aimed to sell its output abroad. This raised
questions about loss of creative autonomy and lack of risk taking (see Born 2004:
309).

Comedy writer David Nobbs' and drama writer Paula Milne's remarks reflect this
view. Nobbs (2004) suggests that a financial approach to comedy production cannot
verify the artistic value of a work – the style and humour it embodies as he notes,
"...good comedy is not calculable in accountants' terms" (253). Milne's experiences,
on the other hand, demonstrate the emergence of 'pre-ordered commissioning briefs'
that, arguably, lead to a loss of creative authority of the creative talent. Milne at-
tended a forum at the BBC in 1996 that was presided over by then Controller of
BBC1 Michael Jackson. Jackson explained that in the future there would be quar-
terly seminars where the administration would tell the writers what they need to do
(Day-Lewis 1998: 103). Milne's response was, "Don't you see Michael, that presup-
poses you know what you need" (cited in Day-Lewis 1998: 103). This situation for
Milne "confirmed that writers' perceptions were no longer welcome, that the pre-
scriptions of broadcasting managers ruled" (Day-Lewis 1998: 103).

These accounts suggest two key differences between the two systems: a) a shift
in the means to achieve 'quality' programming where 'Producer Choice' works with
financial norms; b) the way future productions are planned – e.g. in the new system
administrative staff seem to work on programme ideas and requirements before the
creative personnel are involved. This, for Born (2004), points to the centralisation of
commissioning, with "disciplined production, compromising freedom and diversity
in programme making" (304). For Cooke (2003) these new conditions downgraded
the status of the writer as a 'creator', as they were expected to develop marketable
projects, which would win and retain audiences.

It is helpful to consider Dennis Potter, one of the most celebrated television drama-
tists. For Day-Lewis (1998), Potter "achieved the ultimate in writer power" (viii). In
light of these accounts, Potter's death in 1994 had a greater significance, symbolising
the 'Death of the Author' and the demise of creative autonomy (Cooke 2003). Two
months before his death Potter stated:

> I was given the space to grow into, and [...] I gave my working life to it as a
> result, and [...] I have stayed with television to such a large extent because
> of that. Whereas if I was starting now, where would I get that chance?
> Who would cosset and look after me? Where is the single play? And the
> series, you can punch the numbers in the predictability... You can call the
> shot numbers out in advance. The formula-ridden television is because
> of sales... The pressure upon creators, whether they are writers, directors,
> designers, actors, producers, whatever, that pressure will be all the time
> maximize your audience at any given point, which is the very antithesis
> of discovering something you didn't know. It's the very antithesis of the
> kind of broadcasting on television which was such a glory in British life.
> (cited in Cooke 2003: 165)

Potter raises three points. First, he indicates that when he started in the 1960s
he was given the chance and the space to grow and that the people starting in the
1990s were not given similar chances, thus there were far less opportunities for new
innovative writers. Secondly, he distinguishes single play as the staple of quality and
the series as the representation of 'pre-ordered', cost-effective and market-led televi-
sion, indicating that they lack originality. Finally, he suggests that the 1990s ideology
focused on maximising audiences and cost-effectiveness rather than artistic vision,
which led to the loss of creative autonomy as opposed to the 'ultimate freedom' of
the 1960s. Potter's remarks have similar resonance to those of Simon Gray and Paula
Milne. The insights that these accounts offer are undoubtedly invaluable for this the-
sis. However, they need to be examined in a wider context.

4.1.4 *A Closer Look at the Changes*

Cooke (2003), Gardner and Wyver (1983) and Wilmut (1982) describe the 1960s as the 'golden age' of BBC programme making, which reflected an extraordinary sense of creative freedom. By examining acclaimed BBC TV productions created between the 1960s to the 1980, we can gain a better understanding of the presumed changing programme making ideology of the BBC. Through examples from the commissioning and production stages of *Monty Python's Flying Circus,* selected because of its cult status, we can examine differences between the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Understanding how this outstanding comedy show reached our screens offers a useful comparison for analysing the development process of *The League.* It helps explore the idea of a 'golden age' of programming, and differences between the 'old' and the 'new' ideology of BBC executives, its cultural milieu and ethos (*research question two and three*). This examination illustrates that even one of the most influential comedy shows, which was created in an era that is widely acclaimed for its outstanding attitude for creative freedom, faced difficulties in issues such as scheduling, budgets, censorship and administrative approach.

It is often suggested that one of the reasons behind the success of the *Circus* was the BBC's "willingness to experiment with more unusual forms of entertainment" (Playback 1995: 13). For example, for the first season the BBC commissioned thirteen episodes without insisting on a pilot episode and left the team to work on their material (Wilmut 1982; Playback 1995; Pixley 2002). While this "willingness to experiment" can partly be seen as a response to the threat from the commercial rival ITV (Playback 1995), Wilmut (1982) suggests that it was also related to the influence of the then Director General Hugh Greene, who, for Wilmut, "brought to the post a liberal-minded outlook, which accorded well with the BBC's increasing break away from the cosy image of the 1950s" (57).

On the other hand, Graham Chapman's (one of the Pythons) remarks indicate a different attitude, "I think if the authorities had been aware of what we wanted to do right from the beginning we would never be allowed to do the programme … I don't think the BBC wanted us around the building very much" (Wilmut 1982: 206). It is also suggested that when the BBC commissioned the first series, it was expecting a satire show – something along the lines of *The Frost Report* (BBC, 1966–7)

as all the writers in the Pythons worked on it at some stage (Wilmut 1982) – and when faced with the final material, the *Circus,* the BBC did not really know what to do with the show. This attitude was perhaps evident in the scheduling of the programme. In the first season the BBC kept changing the show's transmission time and sometimes dropped it altogether (Playback 1995; Bamford 1998; Palin 2007). In the second season, the show was given a permanent slot, however, it was scheduled to a BBC-1 Tuesday 10.10pm slot when regional programming took over. Thus, most of the regions never had the chance to see the show until the series was later repeated (see Wilmut 1982; Pixley 2002). Once the programme reached its third series in 1972, the BBC put forward certain "requests for consideration", a list of thirty-two points that the administration wanted changed, which got reduced down to ten through negotiations (cited in Wilmut 1982: 216). Palin indicates that during the show's lifetime they had various meetings with executives and wrote several complaint letters expressing their dissatisfaction with scheduling, budgets and publicity (see 2007: 21, 40 and 42).

These accounts demonstrate that the *Circus* faced issues similar to those already mentioned in discussions about the 1980s and 1990s broadcasting environment. However, these writers also underline a specific attitude in the BBC during the 1960s, a readiness to invest in the talent and new ideas. For instance, Wilmut describes the Pythons as arguably the last people to benefit from such outlook: "Greene left the BBC on 1 April 1969, and it did not take long for the freedom he had bequeathed to evaporate" (1982: 206). Terry Jones', one of the Pythons, remarks are helpful in comparing the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s broadcasting environment:

> At the time a producer was the ultimate authority, and any head of department would back up his producer. It's terribly changed now – nobody can make a decision; the producer can't make any decision without conferring with the head of his department, and the head of his department can't make any decision without conferring with the head of BBC-1, and the head of BBC-1 can't make any decision without going to the Controller of Programmes... (cited in Wilmut 1982: 206)

Jones argues that the emergence of a tighter hierarchy within the organisation lead to the loss of creative autonomy of the producer. This quote is taken from Wilmut's interview with Jones conducted during the research for his book, which was first

published in 1980. Wilmut does not specify the exact dates of the interviews, however we can assume that Jones' assessment were made sometime in the 1970s. With this in mind, then, what Wilmut and Jones point out is the changes in the BBC programme making ideology began at the end of 1960s and can be observed in the 1970s as well as the 1980s. However, in Born's study a former BBC producer looks back to the 1970s from the 1990s and makes a different observation, "There was more freedom in the late seventies; producers had an enormous amount of freedom. The BBC could afford to allow you to experiment, to fail. It doesn't seem able to do that now..." (cited in 2004: 305).

These comments, first of all, make us question the idea of the 'golden age' of television – how we define it and which period it falls into. Although we need to acknowledge that people had different experiences in different productions, they still worked within the same context, under the same roof. What we can observe here is a continuous thread of romanticisation of the past, looking back from the present. Importantly, these accounts also signify that the shifts in the BBC were not as straightforward and sudden as some commentators seem to suggest. The *Circus,* on the other hand, highlights how each production is a unique process whilst being part of a common organisational context. The above discussion also suggest that things were very much linked to the personal attitudes and practices of certain individuals such as Director General, department heads and producers, emphasising the significance of individual input. Consequently, we can argue that the BBC's programme-making contexts in the 1960s, 1970, 1980s and 1990s had more in common with each other than, for example, Born's (2004) analysis appears to indicate.

Potter's 1993 Edinburgh Television Festival speech is enlightening on the idea of a 'golden age'. Day-Lewis explains that Potter recalled how thirty years ago the BBC personnel used to talk about "the evident iniquities of the BBC management, the tapeworm-length persistence of BBC cowardice, and the insufferable perversities of the BBC threat to the very existence of the single play" and stated, "You can imagine how much greater our indignation would have been had we known at the time that we were sitting slap in the middle of what later observers called the 'golden age' of television drama" (cited in 1998: 2). These arguments coincide with the accounts discussed in the examination of the commissioning and production stages of the *Circus.* It illustrates the problematic nature of the term 'golden age'; and high-

lights how each era embodies certain complexities and complications. Accordingly, professionals working across different decades, often felt creatively restricted.

There is also other evidence that challenge the negative outlook on the 1990s, present a bigger picture and help us avoid over generalisations. These include romanticisation of the past, the outlook of independent producers that constitute 25per cent of the BBC's output, as well as the new talent and the new programmes (especially series) that emerge during the 1990s and are acknowledged as outstanding and innovative.

Examining some of the main independent production companies that the BBC works with we can observe the diversity that is introduced into the organisation's programming. Born (2004) and Hendy (2007) underline that many BBC employees who were transferred out or decided to leave the organisation created their own production companies. Apart from former BBC staff, other creatives also set up companies and joined the independent sector. For instance, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the acclaimed actor and comedian Steve Coogan formed Baby Cow Productions together with the successful comedy writer and producer Henry Normal. With their wide network and close relationships with other creatives, like Michael Winterbottom and Rob Brydon, Coogan and Normal were able to produce shows that may not have been created by BBC in-house departments (see Coogan 2009). Baby Cow Productions have also been a major creative contributor to the UK TV industry, especially in terms of comedy production, with shows like *Nighty Night* (BBC, 2004–5) and *The Mighty Boosh* (BBC, 2004–7). These accounts illustrate that the competitive environment may not be as blunting for creativity as it is thought to be.

The other pivotal point that challenges the pessimistic outlook is the emergence of creative talent and innovative programmes during an era that was thought to be ill fated by some observers. Thus, although some of the veterans of television may not have found a place for themselves in the new era, we can argue that there were opportunities that opened up for others. For example, in terms of comedy, in the 1990s we observe the emergence of a group of new creatives such as Armando Iannucci, Steve Coogan and Chris Morris – who were mentioned in the previous chapter. Their successful radio series *On the Hour* (BBC Radio 4, 1991–2) took them to the small screen, where they created *The Day Today* (BBC, 1994). The League of Gentle-

men was another group who found a place for themselves in the BBC broadcasting environment of the 1990s and, just like the first group, are still working for the BBC as well as other broadcasting organisations.

4.1.5 *Quality programming in the BBC during the 1980s & 1990s*

This section looks at the micro instances from the production of *Boys from the Black-stuff* and *Our Friends in the North* – which are quality television series from the eighties and nineties – to illustrate how the BBC production ecology worked during these decades. It therefore reveals how micro level analysis enables us to read the broadcasting environment more clearly. It also helps us understand how cultural breakthroughs emerge in TV production.

These examples highlight how each production is unique and goes through various difficulties, while also being part of larger contexts in which macro, meso and micro influences interact with each other. The key discussions here concern the significance of individuals who are dedicated to create innovative programmes. The accounts demonstrate that breakthroughs are achieved by working within the restrictions of the system. They also underline the potential of series and serials. These discussions help us understand the creation process of *The League*.

Cooke (2003) notes the increasing importance of series and serials and the consequent decline of the single play as two of the key consequences of the shift towards more 'cost-effective television' that emerged in the changing broadcasting context. For example, as Gardner and Wyver (1983) explain, series and serials, compared to single play, were easier to schedule as they were designed to fill a specific slot for a period of time, efficient to produce, maintained fixed costs, were more popular and collected higher ratings, more predictable, tailored to the requirements of the eventual buyers, thus easier to sell, which made them more convenient for the new broadcasting ideology of 'commodity production' that emerged in the 1980s. As noted previously some observers, like Potter, saw the decline in single play as the demise of quality programming, and the rise in series and serials as representing the new 'accountancy' culture in the BBC (see Gardner and Wyver 1983). Although, series and serials were financially desirable, it is important to that they were not without

potential (see Gardner and Wyver, 1983; and Millington and Nelson, 1986). The demise of single drama did not mean the end of diverse and innovative public service broadcasting. In every aspect of television, there were still progressive writers, producers and directors who were looking for ways to 'reinvent' the medium under the challenging circumstances.

For instance, *Boys from the Blackstuff* (BBC, 1982) is a powerful example of a cutting-edge TV drama series that managed to transfer its writer's vision on screen in a form acceptable to the TV industry of the 1980s (Millington and Nelson 1986). Developed from a one-off play, the show reflected the effects of unemployment and became an example of an inventory text created in the hostile landscape of the 1980s. The series not only attempted to reflect and question the social conditions of its time but also pushed the boundaries of genre aesthetics and conventions.

Millington and Nelson (1986) explain that the idea of the series first came to the writer Alan Bleasdale during filming *The Black Stuff* (a single play produced for the BBC) in the autumn of 1978. It was in part the writer's response to the strong working relationships built up on the film. Bleasdale wanted to write a follow up series with the same characters played by the same actors. On 22 November 1978, Bleasdale sent a proposal letter to David Rose (the producer of *The Black Stuff*) and Michael Wearing (the script editor of *The Black Stuff*) explaining his new project, *Boys from the Blackstuff*, which subsequently was accepted (see Millington 1984: 21). Thus, creating a series was a creative decision made by the writer rather than a financial requirement put forward by the administration. The series format allowed Bleasdale to develop and explore the characters, stories and issues he created in his single play.

In line with the previous arguments, Millington (1993) suggests that by the time Bleasdale submitted his proposal in the late 1970s the situation in the TV industry had already started to change. Under the new ideology's goal to produce programmes for the international market it became harder to produce radical and especially regional drama. This was also the case for comedy production (see Vertue 2013). Yet, Millington (1984) notes:

> That *Boys from the Blackstuff* ever found its way onto the screen owes
> much to Bleasdale's letter being directed to English Regions drama, a

> production house whose interests and priorities clearly favoured his work. This small satellite of the BBC Drama group was set up in Birmingham in 1971, headed by David Rose, with the clear commitment to developing new work for television from the regional writers being taken up in the local repertory theatres. (121)

Wearing (cited in Bleasdale, Walters et al. 2011) and Rose (cited in Millington and Nelson 1986: 25) note that although there were different departmental attitudes within the BBC, there were certain units that valued writers' vision and individual voice.

If *Boys from the Blackstuff* can be seen as one of the highlights of 1980s innovative television, *Our Friends in the North* (BBC2, 1996) is a primary example of such programming in the 1990s. This programme was also produced by English Regions Drama. The series' writer Peter Flannery explains that it took approximately 15 years before the show was seen on TV, during which it got commissioned three times and cancelled twice (Marks 1997). Flannery explained that during the evolution process of the series he faced many challenges to creating television 'on his own terms' and fulfilling his career ambition (Day-Lewis, 1998: 182). The writer had to make some compromises and work within the restrictions imposed by higher level management. Nevertheless, he also employed a considerable measure of authority to fight for his artistic vision, as well as to request, demand and negotiate certain terms and conditions (Day-Lewis 1998; Eaton 2005).

Flannery had major influence through the commissioning stage on matters such as the number of episodes and their durations (Day-Lewis 1998: 183). He was also deeply involved in the filming. As the writer explains, he used to attend shoots and if an actor had any problems with the script s/he would come and talk to him, and without his permission nothing could be changed (see Day-Lewis 1998: 186). Flannery's authority covered a larger area than what was spoken on screen. After the final commission, it was the writer who assembled the principle members of the creative team. He chose to move Michael Wearing away from the producer position and preferred to work with Charlie Pattinson, while Wearing became the executive producer. Flannery explains, "He [Michael Wearing] was head of department, it was no good, I was finishing off the scripts and I needed to work with someone who had

time" (cited in Day-Lewis 1998: 185). Later on, again, it was the writer, together with Pattinson, who decided to change the director during filming.

This account presents a different portrayal of the production environment. The writer, as a part of a creative team, seems to command a certain degree of authority. Flannery exercised the power to stand for his vision and most importantly had a presence in the decision making process, that was unlike Simon Gray's experience. Flannery reflects on the subject of artistic control:

> It is not necessarily healthy to serve the scripts as with Dennis Potter's *Karaoke* [(BBC/ Channel 4, 1996)]. Myself I think Dennis was one of two writers, I won't name the other, who achieved massive power over their own material and did not use that power wisely. I am not in that position but I could be if I wanted. I am much happier having the producer and script editor I want, [who can] make me think twice [...]. It may be painful but I think it's beneficial. I think there's a balancing act between the purity of the writer's voice and the business in which we work. (cited in Day-Lewis 1998: 186)

The 'behind the scenes' stories from *Boys form the Blackstuff* and *Our Friends in the North* provide a clear view on the inner workings of the BBC. While it is evident that the collaborators of the shows endured tough and daunting phases, the outcome and the insight they provide also illustrate the positive and constructive elements within the production process and the BBC. These examples highlight that 'quality' texts of the eighties and nineties, like their sixties and seventies counterparts, experienced various difficulties during commissioning and production stages.

The arguments then point to the essentiality of a detailed analysis of a production process for a comprehensive understanding of a text as well as its evolution. It also suggests that the fate of a show is crucially depends on the people who are involved in its creation. This links us to Cottle (2003) as well as Davis and Scase's (2000) discussions on media production. They suggest that macro elements such as organisational culture, strategy and structure are not the key and only determinants of culture production, and thus that meso and micro influences, such as individual input and production atmosphere, too have significant influence on the creative processes and output. They also suggest that professional practices tend to shape the

execution of tasks, the definition of organisational roles in relation to specific circumstances and conditions as well as organisational structures and strategies (Davis and Scase 2000: 13–18). The micro level analysis of *The League* that takes place in *chapters five*, *six*, *seven* and *eight* will provide clear evidence on these accounts and further these discussions.

4.1.6   *Summary of 4.1*

This sub-chapter examined the shifts in the structure of the British television industry focusing on the BBC between the late 1970s to the end of 1990s. It first explored the influence of macro changes – i.e. political and economic – on the BBC's organisational structure, strategies and culture. Then it examined the influence of these changes on the work environment, working relationships, occupational roles, creative autonomy and creative output. It underlined that the BBC, during the 1980s and especially in the 1990s, was transforming towards a more market-led organisation with the impact of a new broadcasting ideology, which focused on financial measures rather than artistic vision to create quality programming. This shift embodied a new kind of managerialism, a new system 'Producer Choice', tightening of hierarchy, the independent quota and casualisation of employment. This new environment, for some commentators, challenged creative autonomy, experimentation and innovation in the name of minimising risks and inefficiencies, and restricted innovative and quality programming subsequently leading to an increasing managerial control over creative practices and decrease in creative autonomy of creative personnel (e.g. writer and producer). Some media professionals, such as Dennis Potter, claimed that the 1980s and 1990s environment was a complete opposite of the 1960s climate, 'the heyday' of quality television.

4.1 examined specific television shows – which are recognised as outstanding programmes of their times – created during the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s in order to contextualise forgoing discussions within the big picture, and to analyse differences and similarities between broadcasting environments and creative practices during these decades. The key argument here was that such a bottom up approach that focuses on the micro-instances helps us develop a more fully informed macro-account (see Mittell 2004). The analysis revealed a sense of romanticisation of the past. Cre-

atives felt that there was a lack of risk taking even in the 1960s, which observers later described the 'golden age' of quality programming. We observe similar complaints made during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s . Although, this does not invalidate the major structural and cultural changes that the BBC was going through, especially in the 1990s, it reveals that the decades in question have more in common than some observers suggest. The study of these micro-instances also highlight that opportunities for new creatives still existed, and quality programmes were still being created.

The micro-studies also help us answer the *research questions two and three* on how quality programmes such as *The League* are created, what are the influential factors that influence their creative processes and how the production ecology works. The micro studies revealed that each production is a unique process, yet they are linked through the wider context – so while we see certain similarities, there are also important differences. A key point here is that apart from the macro elements, individual input, personal attitudes and practices of professionals are significant factors in a creative process. This illustrates that apart from more tangible elements such as strategies and structures there are other more elusive factors that have a significant place in culture production. This line of argument emphasises the complex nature of production ecologies. This understanding is very useful to the analysis of *The League*.

4.2   Production of Culture & Cultures of Production

This sub-chapter furthers the discussions on the tension between economic measures and creative concerns that was observed in the context of the BBC production ecology, the importance of elusive elements in media production, such as individual input, as well as the significance of micro and meso levels analysis. The accounts here demonstrate the limitations of the culture/creativity and commerce/economic split, acknowledging the complex and ambivalent relationship between the creators, the industries and the texts, as well as establishing creative organisations as platforms of negotiation, conflict, and compromise. In the case of the BBC this opposition is explored as creative concerns/financial measures dialectic. The discussions signify the complexities within cultures of production (media organisations) and produc-

tion of culture (creative processes). The key argument is that a television text should be understood neither as the creation of an 'auteur' nor a fully industrialised, characterless thing. These accounts help understand and answer *research question two* on how the production ecology within the BBC in the context of *The League* worked, and *research question one and three* on how *The League,* as a cultural breakthrough, emerged.

4.2 furthers the key points of *4.1* "TV Industry and Production from 1970s to the beginning of 2000s"; by exploring the significance of the more elusive elements in culture production and their significance for creating 'cultural breakthroughs'. This sub-chapter focuses on the following: professional roles (e.g. writer and producer), individual input, working relationships, collaboration in media production, division of labour, creative autonomy, creative/executive threshold, and the financial measures and artistic concerns dialectic. These aspects are crucial to the analysis of the creation of *The League* and the BBC as a media organisation (see Hesmondhalgh 2007). The discussions about these issues clearly have a long tradition.

4.2 starts out by exploring the concept of 'culture industry' that forms the basis for the discussions on the culture/economic split, which identifies culture production within media organisations as a standardised process and their products as lacking originality. Throughout this chapter the discussion highlight the limitations of this approach and its failure to account for today's culture production, especially in the case of the BBC. As Negus (1997), Ellis (2004) and Ryan (1992) suggest, media organisations cannot simply control, standardise and de-individualise creative activity in a straightforward manner. This argument connects us to *4.1* and challenges the accounts that were presented about the BBC broadcasting environment of the 1980s and 1990s, which partly suggested that the macro determinants had completely altered and standardised culture production at the time.

Although, the 'culture industry' concept and the culture/economic split are misguided approaches, they are still crucial for this thesis as they generate important themes for understanding how creativity is managed within the BBC, professional roles, working relationships, production environment, creative autonomy and organisational structure (see Hesmondhalgh 2007). These themes are negotiation, conflict and struggle, which set the tone in this sub-chapter as well as the analysis of the creation process of *The League*.

4.2.2 focuses on the relevance of the culture/economic split to the issue of creative autonomy. The discussions here reflect these two concepts as hybrid categories (see Peterson 1976; Du Gay 1997). The concept creative autonomy helps explain how creativity is handled in media organisations, and define professional roles, which are explored in 4.2.3. The accounts here highlight how the culture/economic polarisation fails to explain the working relationships between professionals. They also signify the influence of professional relationships on creative processes and output, pointing to the influence of more elusive aspects. 4.2.4 focuses on two of the most intrinsic roles in media production and their relationships: producer (creative manager) and writer (primary creative personnel) (Hesmondhalgh 2007). This professional relationship demonstrates the framework of television production – a system of negotiation, mutual adjustment and compromise. This section then examines the two widely discussed approaches, the producer as a restricting force and the idea of the writer as a 'genius' who is single-handedly responsible for culture production while underlining their limitations. 4.2.5 works with the themes 'collaborative nature of production' and 'individual input'. It emphasises the specificity of each production and creative labour as well as the significance of individual input. It demonstrates the significance of the meso and micro levels of analysis to tackle the internal variety of television production (Negus 1997; Cottle 2003; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011). These arguments support the approach of this thesis as a discursive study that integrates macro, meso and micro levels of analysis. 4.2.6 focuses on the internal variety in television in which fads and cultural breakthroughs co-exist. It also explores how ground-breaking works emerge. In relation to the arguments on the multiplex nature of production, 4.2.7 explores Mittell's (2004) cultural approach to TV genre theory that stresses the complex interrelations between texts, industries, audiences and historical context, given its centrality on analysis of texts or aspects of texts such as genre.

4.2.1 *Changes in the Understanding of Art & Culture: Individual to Industry(ies)*

Adorno and Horkheimer and many of their contemporaries in the twentieth centuries associated the term 'culture' to "its ideal state with art, with special, exceptional forms of human creativity" (Hesmondhalgh 2007: 16). They identified art as

an individual creation. In their analysis of the relationship between art and commerce, Adorno and Horkheimer coined the term 'culture industry' in a work written in 1944, first published in 1947. They adopted the term to argue that art was no longer independent from industry and that "cultural items were produced analogous to how other industries manufactured vast quantities of consumer goods" (Negus 1997: 70), which suggests the industrialisation of culture. Hesmondhalgh (2007) underlines that this idea of commoditisation of culture signifies to the integration of the notions culture and industry into one. From the 1960s onwards, the term 'cultural industries' became widely used (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011).

Adorno and Horkheimer linked the idea of the 'culture industry' to a model of 'mass culture' in which both cultural production and consumption were assumed to be routine and standardised, thus signifying products to be undemanding and the audience to be passive. They used the metaphor of the 'assembly-line' to stress this repetitive and routine character of cultural production, in which standardisation and pseudo individuality are intrinsic (Negus 1997). The writers assumed that every cultural product created within 'the industry' was produced on the basis of a standard formula, and therefore they are almost exactly the same and lack any individual distinct characteristic and quality. The term pseudo-individuality signifies that while these 'standardised' products are promoted for being 'original' the differences they exhibit are mainly insignificant.

Negus (1997) argues that the process of production is by no means as standardised, rational and predictable as suggested by this approach, and stresses that culture-producing organisations cannot simply control, standardise and de-individualise creative activities in any straightforward manner. This argument then challenges the accounts that were presented about the BBC broadcasting environment of the 1980s and 1990s, which suggest that the macro determinants had completely altered and standardised culture production at the time. On the other hand, Negus points to the positive aspects of standardisation. For instance, genre conventions, as an element of standardisation, can be a source of pleasure both for creators, as they make use of genre conventions as well as modify them to express their vision, and for audiences, who read and interpret texts as active participants with their existing knowledge on these conventions.

Ellis (2004), in his examination of TV production, identifies routinisation and standardisation as key aspects of a production process. While recognising routinisation as a danger for creative freedom, Ellis also notes its advantages, especially for producers, as it helps to create a framework of common understandings. Since a large number of professionals are involved in production processes, what they need is a collective 'language', common knowledge and reference points that they can communicate with in order to work effectively. What Ellis suggests is that production team members, for instance, use genre conventions as the common ground, which they communicate through. Ellis charts the attributes of standardisation: efficiency, abbreviation, promotion of collective activity and common understanding.

Ryan (1992) sees standardisation, or in his words rationalisation, as a means of making capital from culture. Ryan suggests that making profit out of culture is not particularly a bad thing. For Ryan, rationalising cultural production works both at the creative stage and the circulation stage. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) note, "At the creative stage it is achieved through what Ryan calls formatting, especially the use of genre-based, star-based series of production, to act as an identifiable marker of the kinds of experiences that cultural products aims to offer" (84). While genre is the primary aspect of publicity and marketing, writer, director or actor names, as 'stars', are also used for promotion of cultural products (Hesmondhalgh 2007). For example, Alan Bleasdale's name was the primary source of publicity in the case of *Boys from the Blackstuff* (see Millington 1993).

Signalling to the multiplex nature of standardisation and routinisation, Hesmondhalgh (2007) identifies 'formatting' of cultural products both as one of the ways that cultural-industry companies cope with the high levels of risk in the sector, yet also as a useful apparatus for audiences. This, then, takes Ryan's approach one step further as it includes the reception stage. So, cultural products not only organised (on the creative level) and marketed (in the circulation stage), as underlined in Ryan's accounts, via means of standardisation/formatting, but also have a part in the reception as the viewers' interpretations and expectations are influenced by these elements. For instance, in terms of genre, horror film is a good example for illustrating such a multi-dimensional and encompassing system of relations that includes organisation, marketing and interpretation. Genres operate as labels or brand names. They suggest to viewers what kind of pleasures can be attained through experiencing the

product, while viewers interpret and read the texts through these suggestions and based on their previous experiences of that genre. Although horror genre has its specific conventions, well-established production companies also have their own distinct styles. Within British horror, for instance, Hammer Studios and Amicus House of Horror constituted their own trademarks. Their products were marketed via the company names and the audiences knew what to expect from those films (see Rigby 2005). This demonstrates that genre conventions should not be seen only as creative constraints, ideological and stylistic limitations. They can offer creative opportunities that enrich a text (see Reeves, Brent et al. 1995). Acknowledging this complexity noted by Ellis (2004), Negus (1997) and Ryan (1992), Hesmondhalgh (2007) argues that we should approach the relationship between the creators, the industries and the texts as complex, ambivalent and contested—offering a useful framework for the analysis of *The League*.

4.2.2 *Culture vs Commerce & the Issue of Creative Autonomy*

This, then, brings us to the issue of creative autonomy. Hesmondhalgh (2007), as well as Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) stress that understanding how creative autonomy is structured is absolutely crucial for understanding cultural industries, creative labour and their products. Discussions about symbolic creativity and creative autonomy in cultural industries have a long history of exploring the tensions and contradictions between culture and economics, creativity and commerce. Negus and Pickering (2004) distinguish three positions on the creativity/commerce split:

> A romantic, pseudo-political position that acting creatively is perpetually and inevitably at odds with being controlled industrially. A populist, market liberal position that commerce is the condition which inspires creativity. A sociological position that commerce and creativity have become so inextricably bound together as to be indistinguishable. (cited in Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011: 85)

Negus and Pickering recognise "creativity and commerce as distinct dynamics that are nevertheless intertwined, producing a series of tensions – including organisationally and in terms of the experiences of creative workers" (Hesmondhalgh and Baker

2011: 85). With a similar approach, Du Gay (1997) argues that in late modern societies, the 'economic' and the 'cultural' are intrinsically hybrid categories. Du Gay, along with many other writers such as Negus (1997), Hesmondhalgh (2007), Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011), and Peterson (1976), attempt "to sidestep positions which assume either an essential opposition between two spheres of existence or an essentially deterministic relationship between them, where one side completely dominates the other" and "acknowledge the mutually constitutive relationship between 'culture' and 'economy'" (Du Gay 1997: 2).

In the context of the BBC as a public service broadcasting organisation, however, this counter point is inadequate. As illustrated in the previous section, the BBC, during the 1980s and the 1990s was going through major cultural changes. It is noted by writers such as Born (2004), that the organisation was transforming into a more commercially minded corporation through the introduction of a new managerialism. Yet, this is not to say that the BBC became a commercial corporate body. The Corporation still embodies a public broadcasting ethos, which was, however, challenged and influenced by a new ideology. Thus, the discussions on culture and commerce concerning the BBC should be examined as a debate between creative concerns and financial measures. To emphasise, creativity, culture and commerce rub against rationality and analytical thinking. This is a complex system of culture production practice that requires a balance between creative autonomy and artistic vision, together with time and funding. In the new broadcasting environment it would be misguided to characterise economic and creative concerns as radically opposed. This approach is very useful to the analysis of *The League*, as we will see in the exploration of occupational roles, the producer's role in culture production is, in a certain fashion, the embodiment of this balancing act.

Nevertheless, Hesmondhalgh (2007) stresses that although the idea that creativity/finance opposition is a romantic conception that seems to be inadequate to explain culture production, it is vital to our understanding of cultural industries and the distinctive nature of cultural production. With this approach, Hesmondhalgh describes the relationship between creativity and commerce, or in the case of the BBC creativity versus financial measures, as a matter of negotiation, conflict and even struggle. This relationship shapes professional roles, how creativity is managed

in media organisations such as the BBC, and how cultural products like *The League* are created.

4.2.3 *Media Organisations & Professional Roles*

To see how creative autonomy is handled in media organisations, we need to take a look at some of the models media organisations use to manage creativity. Following the discussions in *4.1*, Davis and Scase (2000) as well as Ryan (1992) argue that in the 1990s there were major changes in the way the cultural industries were organised, and therefore in the management of symbolic creativity. Ryan's accounts are especially useful in assessing changes and continuities in the management of creativity. In an attempt to understand transitions in history, Ryan distinguishes two main eras: the market professional era and the complex professional era, the latter dominating cultural production from the 1950s onwards.[1] Hesmondhalgh (2007) explains, "In the market professional era, the creative stage of making cultural products used to be carried out primarily by individuals, but in the era of the complex professional form of cultural production, it is nearly always carried out by a 'project team'" (64). The significance of Ryan's model lies in acknowledging the division of cultural labour, "in which creative personnel were [are] loosely controlled by creative managers acting on behalf of the interest of owners and executives, but where circulation and reproduction were [are] much more tightly controlled" (Hesmondhalgh 2007: 193).

Hesmondhalgh (2007) notes, "This combination of loose control of creative input and tighter control of reproduction and circulation constitutes the distinctive organisational form of cultural production during the complex professional era" (69). This tight control over other aspects of culture production, for Hesmondhalgh, signals "[t]he increasing presence and status of marketing" becoming more professionalised and having a more significant role in the coordination of activities in the cultural industries – representing "a shift in the organisational structure of cultural production" (197). However, Hesmondhalgh emphasises that the increasing role of marketing is not only about its influence over circulation strategies, but over the conception stage of cultural production as well. Ryan's (1992) and Hesmondhalgh's (2007) frame-

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[1]Hesmondhalgh (2007) stresses that "...we need to avoid understanding the features of one era as completely displacing those of previous eras" (54).

works help understand the changing context of the BBC and its shifts towards a more market-led organisation (see also Abercrombie 1991).

Ryan (1992) sketches six categories which are: primary creative personnel, technical workers, creative managers, marketing personnel, owners and executives, and, unskilled and semi-skilled labour. While primary creative personnel include the directors and the authors (what Hesmondhalgh describes as symbol creators), technical workers include professionals such as camera operators and floor managers. Hesmondhalgh (2007) explains that while creativity is also involved here, it still is not at the same level with the conception of ideas that form the basis of the end text. This framework positions creative managers, such as the producer, as "mediators in between the creative personnel and interest of owners and executives (who have the power to hire and fire personnel and set the general direction of company policy, but have limited role in the conception and development of particular texts)" (Hesmondhalgh 2007: 64).

The arguments about the strict division between creativity and commerce underpins a distinction between the professional roles of producers and writers, by putting producers in opposition with creativity and defining them as agents of creative constraint, which then in turn promotes a misinterpretation of their roles. Hesmondhalgh and Baker's (2011) observations are highly useful:

> In television, as in the recording industry, the creative management role is split. One key role is that of the producer, who serves a head of a project team working on a programme; whether a one-off or a series. The producer must mediate between, on the one hand, the writers, directors, actors, camera operators, and on the other hand, more senior management, including the other creative manager in British television, the commissioner or controller. The commissioner acts as head of a department, and departments are defined by genre, such as documentary, drama religious affairs, arts, etc. The relationship between commissioners and creative personnel can be highly effective, or it can be another source of potential conflict... (96)

Hesmondhalgh and Baker not only reject traditional views on the role of the creative manager, and the strict polarisation of certain occupational functions, but also

emphasise the influence of the relationship between the professionals in the production process. The analysis of *The League*, through its micro approach, offers a deeper insight to these issues (see *chapters five, six, seven and eight*).

4.2.4 *Producer & Writer*

This section focuses on two key professional roles – producers as creative managers and writers as primary creative personnel – and explores the relationship between these two roles, which is defined as "the most intense creative relationship within television" (Eaton 2005: 26). The key issues that arise from the creativity/finance split are the idea of the producer being a restricting force on creativity and the writer as the ultimate creative force who single-handedly manages a production process. The accounts here highlight the limitations of such oppositional approaches and illustrate the collaborative nature of production. The relationship between producer and writer sets out a framework of television production that emphasise negotiation, mutual adjustment and compromise. This framework builds the foundations for analysing professional practices during the creative process of *The League*.

Examining professional roles in the 1980s Newcomb and Alley (1982) consider television as the medium of producers, signifying their autonomy, but suggest that producers' autonomy has been widely recognised as a restricting force that constrains individual creativity. Yet, thy also acknowledge producers as creative artists, and suggest that "producers, clearly aware of limitations, work within, around, and through them to achieve creative goals" (70). In their examination of the production of *Boys from the Blackstuff*, Millington and Nelson (1986) explain the role of the producer:

> The person at the centre of this initial planning is the producer, who occupies the key co-ordinating role throughout the production. It is the producer's job to ensure that the best artistic product is achieved within the funds and time available. Even though certain decisions may have to be referred upwards to the department head, the producer is ultimately in charge of the entire production and it is on the soundness of his judgements that the success or failure of the project largely rests. (38)

The observation of the pre-production stage of *Boys from the Blackstuff* and how Michael Wearing, the series' producer, handled creative and financial concerns provides concrete examples and helps us understand the role of the producer. For Millington and Nelson (1986), Wearing had to wrestle with more organisational problems than a usual production because the series was technically and contextually ground breaking. Millington (1993) suggests that "It was chiefly due to the tenacity of Michael Wearing, the series' producer that Blackstuff was prevented from foundering in the face of inadequate budget resources" (122). Millington and Nelson (1986) acknowledge that Wearing's approach demonstrates "the especial tactical and improvisational tactics required of the successful producer" (39). For example, Bleasdale's script demanded on location shooting and involved a high number of locations. Shooting on location, together with shooting with film and many location changes would surpass the standard budget and resource allocations. Millington and Nelson explain that "Michael Wearing strove, as far as possible, to follow the scheme and resist easy production compromises. At the same time, the planning had to be realistic if the project was to receive approval. Effectively, the producer steered a middle course" (40). Wearing thought that shooting on location was very important for the project to capture the authentic Liverpool background and a formal comprise to shoot in studio was unacceptable. Ideally, Bleasdale wanted the series to be shot on film, but since shooting on film would take longer and be more costly, Wearing decided to shoot on location with, then new, lightweight electronic camera operating system on OB (outside broadcast video unit). This was an artistic as well as an economic decision. OB required less location time, needed less equipment and also in most technical respects could match a conventional film unit, through which very significant saving could be made. On the other hand, Wearing and David Rose (the executive producer) saw the series as an opportunity to fulfill their desire to explore what could be achieved dramatically from the new technological advances in lightweight cameras and editing (Millington and Nelson 1986). This example demonstrates the producer's role as a mediator. It also illustrates that producers do not only deal with economic concerns but also with artistic ones. Newcomb and Alley's (1982) observations are valuable:

> The point is neither choice (artistic and economic) is separable or identifiable as primary... The self-conscious artistic producer must recognize the

fact that economically motivated decision will affect his artistic choices. Indeed, that is how the self-conscious producers determine what to fight for. Pressure in the form of audience response, Nielsen ratings, or network clout may affect either sort of decision. Our own view is that there are no strict lines, finally, that separate the artistic from the financial from the ethical from the social. Economic choices are symbolic choices. Symbolic choices must be expressed technically. Audience response and network pressure are indications of distinctions among values, perceptions, and aesthetic preferences. Those critics who overlook the systematic nature of popular, and those producers who cannot or do not cope with the interactions at all these levels are unlikely to succeed... (77–78)

Following Negus and Pickering's (2004), Peterson's (1976) and Du Gay's (1997) discussions on the hybridisation of the 'economic' and the 'cultural' these accounts illustrate that within the production ecology putting economic and artistic concerns in opposition to each other will develop a misguided framework. These writers also point out that ground breaking works are developed by professionals who operate through the interaction of different elements, as in the case of *BftB*.

Tunstall's (1993) work illustrates the changing roles of British television producers in the 1990s – due to changes at the BBC and ITV, and the increasing involvement of independent companies in production – and provides a good case study of the fate of creative autonomy. In the early periods of the complex professional system:

Television producers effectively functioned in many cases as leaders of creative teams which, in many situations, they could build themselves (see Tunstall, 1993: 24–26). They were answerable to a number of higher decisions from senior management, especially regarding scheduling, overall budget and number of programmes and broad editorial directions, but their autonomy within these overall guidelines was considered the guarantee of quality within the British system. (Hesmondhalgh, 2007: 198)

Subsequently, Tunstall (1993) sums up the producers' changed roles as more responsible and autonomous but less secure. Tunstall's account, on the one hand, supports the arguments on the changing landscape of British Television industry yet also

challenges those who suggest producers as well as the primary creative personnel lost autonomy (see *4.1*).

On the account of the creative autonomy of the primary creative personnel, Hesmondhalgh (2007) explains that although the creators have a degree of creative autonomy, it is carried out under the supervision of creative managers. Yet, he notes that in the complex professional era that we are in today, there is still considerable space for the creators, such as screenwriters and directors within certain formats and genres. For example, Tunstall indicates that British television still sees comedy writers as central in comedy production (1993: 126). Tunstall (1993) argues that interpersonal chemistry between writer and producer is seen as salient in comedy, and comedy producers in general share the basic perception that the writers' individuality should be honoured. Hesmondhalgh (2007) also suggests that the creative managers' control is not always negative. Similarly, Newcomb and Alley (1982) argue that creativity is never a process of complete freedom; yet, it is open to creative manipulation and "certain individuals choose the constraints of television as the boundaries in which they work to create special forms and meanings..." (88). Thus we can see certain elements of television production as creative constraints that allow "for creativity and imagination within certain set of boundaries" (Hesmondhalgh 2007: 70) that are open for both primary creative personnel as well as creative managers.

The examples from *Our Friends in the North* help explain the relationship between executive-producer, producer and writer; signify television production as a collaboration rather than a process under a single professional's autonomy; illustrate how ground-breaking works develop through mutual trust between team members and explore how creative manipulation can be achieved in production processes. Michael Wearing, the executive producer, and Charlie Pattinson, the producer, appreciated the writer Peter Flannery's vision (see Day-Lewis 1998) and their investment in the writers' vision allowed them to express their own voices within the boundaries of television. Flannery's accounts are very useful:

> Before shooting there were 20 hours of material for the nine episodes, we probably shot 13 hours and transmitted 11 of them. So obviously there were massive compromises, it couldn't have been any other way, whoever produced. I fought for longer episodes, I lost that fight, I won some things, I didn't win everything. You have to deal with the reality

of that. You have to surround yourself with the right people with good
opinions, intelligent and creative, a good script editor, a good producer,
good directors. Then the process, although it is painful, need not to be
destructive. There comes a point where you move from serving the scripts
to serving the production, that's a fact of life. (cited in Day-Lewis 1998:
186)

These arguments on television production, demonstrate the complexities and mul-
tiplex nature within media organisations and professional roles. They refuse the
reductionist approaches that see creative autonomy as a deterministic practice. The
key terms that are highlighted here, and will keep coming up throughout, are negotia-
tion, conflict, manipulation and compromise (Davis and Scase 2000; Hesmondhalgh
and Baker 2011) .

Along with the creative manager as ultimate restricting force, the creativity/econo-
mic split creates a second problematic notion, a genius 'auteur' who is single hand-
edly responsible for the whole creation and completely detached from other aspects
of cultural production. This viewpoint led to another romantic and controversial
view, which is the 'death of the author' indicating creativity, authorship and original-
ity being deprecated by commercial and economic concerns.

Hesmondhalgh (2007) indicates that this romantic and elitist approach to author-
ship, which emerges from the pre-industrial era is inadequate to exploring the work-
ings of cultural industries in the complex professional era, in which division of labour
is acknowledged to be a vital feature. However, this situation does not diminish the
importance of creators, as Ryan (1992) identify them to be the 'primary creative per-
sonnel' who are mainly responsible for the conception of an original idea, which is
also influenced by other professionals working within the system. To emphasise, ac-
cording to this widely acknowledged model, it is still the primary creative personnel
who exercise significant influence on the end product. As a writer who accepts and
acknowledges the collaborative nature of television, Bleasdale explains the impor-
tance of collaboration and his place within a production team:

There has never been a piece of mine that hasn't been massively improved
by contact with other people, by consensus and talk and their ideas. Some
of the very best ideas I've ever had have been other people's! It needs a

certain eye and intellect that I don't have. Whether the strengths of my work in terms of emotional content, characterisation, dialogue, humour and pathos, it often needs somebody to shape and organise it. I'm not embarrassed about that. That's the way it should be; otherwise go and write a novel! (cited in Millington and Nelson, 1986: 58)

The important point is that a writer is no longer viewed as an extraordinary genius, but as one of the creative and skilful personnel working on a project team. Williams' (1965/1961) views are very useful in understanding this relatively new approach to 'the author'. Williams not only establishes art and creativity to be ordinary notions – and so the creator- but also recognises them to be intense human activities. Looking at this framework, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) observes, "Creative workers then are far more ordinary than traditional views of 'art' would have us believe. There is nevertheless something extraordinary about them. Their work is the communication of experience through symbolic production" (61).

Hesmondhalgh (2007) indicates that in recent studies on cultural industries, symbol creators have been mostly ignored "because of an understandable, but excessive reaction against the fetishisation of their work as extraordinary" (5). Hesmondhalgh adds:

> ... in the 1990s, a number of writers in these fields began to put symbol creators back in the picture[....] After all, symbol creators are the primary workers in the making of texts. Texts, by definition, would not exist without them, however much they rely on industrial systems for the reproduction, distribution and marketing of and remuneration for their work. This does not mean that we should romantically celebrate musicians, authors, film-makers and so on. (5)

Hesmondhalgh's argument emphasises the importance of studying the input of the primary creative personnel and their continuing significance in culture production, thus their influence on the texts. Nevertheless, Hesmondhalgh, just like Williams (1965/1961), refuses to follow any single-minded perspective and acknowledges a more complex understanding of individual creative labour. This recognises the specificity of the creative personnel's work yet places it within a system of production processes.

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4.2.5 *Division of Labour*

This section focuses on the collaborative nature of production, and demonstrates the importance of individual input. This takes us to the specificity of each production and creative labour to underline that while many productions may share the same macro broadcasting context (organisational strategies and aims) individuals have a specific professional attitude that makes each production a unique experience. Cottle (2003), Negus (1997) and Hesmondhalgh (2007) indicate that macro level analysis is inadequate to tackle such internal variety pointing to the significance of meso and micro level analysis.

Ryan and Peterson (1982) stress the collaborative nature of production in which "a number of skilled specialists have a part in shaping the final work as it goes through series of stages" (11). Ellis (2004) argues that while primary creators do come up with ideas, these ideas, however, are shaped and influenced by other creative contributors of production (see also Becker 1976).

For example, in *Boys from the Blackstuff* Millington cites three names, the writer Alan Bleasdale, the producer Michael Wearing and the director Phillip Saville to be at the heart of the decision making process. Millington (1984) underlines, "The eventual shape of the series, the establishment of final scripts and the details of the final cut of the series were all determined as a result of a group discussion" (9). During these discussions throughout the production process a number of significant changes were made to the original drafts. Bleasdale explains:

> The best thing came out of it was that Philip handed me back Episode 3 complete and said that in comparison with the other three this was a load of rubbish! To which I replied, 'Well, the typing is good!' Nobody had ever done that to me before! He was absolutely right! ... (cited in Millington 1984: 12–13)

This example, supports Ellis's (2004) and Ryan and Peterson's (1982) observations, and illustrates that culture production is not a linear process but a complex system. According to Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) understanding specificity of labour is key to our understanding:

> Only through an institutional analysis of the way that organisational
> forms mediate the specificity of creative labour can we really understand
> work in the cultural industries. This will serve as a meso-level of analysis
> between our ethnographic focus on worker experience and the account
> of the systematic and structural features of cultural production... Un-
> derstanding the specificity of creative labour helps us to understand that
> work autonomy takes on particular significance – and particular organ-
> isational forms – when placed in the context of the cultural industries.
> (61)

In this sense, Hesmondhalgh and Baker designate the significance of meso-level analysis of media organisation structures. Their study observes, for instance, that different controllers and producers have different approaches, being collaborative or interventionist, for example. The idea of specificity of programmes, individual practices and inputs, challenges views that emphasise severe standardisation of BBC output in the 1990s as well as Adorno and Horkheimer's notion of 'culture industry'.

Newcomb and Alley (1982), in their study on TV producers, suggest that "Neither the clearest intention nor the most extensive control can assure homogeneity. It is this pattern of variety within similarity that is more apparent when we examine the work of other producers with individual styles, definitions, descriptions, and intentions" (87). This coincides with Negus's (1997) idea of the culture industry(ies) as an interchangeable and less predictable entity, which signifies the specificity of each production process and the significance of the context of creation. For Negus, analysis needs to focus on "micro relations and the cultural worlds" (102) within each case, for a rounded understanding of the work, its creative process and the broadcasting climate it is created in. These accounts point to the inadequateness of a macro only approach, and underline that multiple levels of input influence a production process (see also Cottle 2003; Steemers 2010), thus offering strong justifications of the discursive approach adopted by this thesis.

4.2.6 *'Circuit of Culture' & Television's Internal Variety*

This section reviews discussions on production of culture and cultures of production, which hold that media products are created in several different sites and circulate through several different processes and practices. These processes include conception, production, circulation and reception stages. Although reception is not one of the main elements examined in this thesis, its significance should be acknowledged.

While this section underlines television's internal variety, pointing out the co-existence of fads and cultural breakthroughs, it also highlights the significant space that exists for creative manipulation in creative organisations and processes. In doing so it supports the discussion and examples in the previous sections, which illustrated that individuals can create opportunities within standardised organisational structures and strategies. These discussions develop our understanding of how cultural breakthroughs like *The League* emerge within culture producing organisations (*research question one and three*).

Hirsch's (1972) model of 'filter flow' endorses the idea of a singular artistic individual being responsible for the creation of a cultural product, providing, what Hirsch calls, the 'raw material' which is then processed and passed through the system of public. Yet, Peterson's framework of 'production of culture' opposes the idea of cultural artefacts being simply the work of an individual artist. Peterson (1976) identifies synchronic analysis as an alternative method of analysis of the production-of-culture perspective. Peterson's method is a discursive practice. He defines synchronic analysis as a "comparative study of the production process from creation to consumption" (14) and lists the following to be its most important features:

> the mechanisms by which 'originality' and 'innovation' are judged; the effects of different means of financing production (from patronage to market economy) on the sorts of symbols produced; the means of managing tensions of seeking esoteric group goals while being constrained by patrons and consumers to produce practical products; the impact of technology and the social organization of production of the kinds of symbols produced; the impact of 'gate keepers' (company executives, editorial boards, museums, ecumenical councils, censors, referees, accountants);

the contexts in which culture products are used; and the impact of consumers on the production process. (14–15)

Jensen's (1984) approach to culture production and Becker's (1976) conception of 'art worlds' support this discursive approach. Their frameworks position culture production as a collaborative process constructed via production, distribution and consumption. Here, then all three writers, Negus (1997), Jensen (1984) and Becker (1976) indicate that 'production of culture' takes place throughout conception, production and reception stages. Du Gay's (1997) concept of the 'circuit of culture' is also relevant here. This framework suggests that in culture industries, cultural meanings "are produced at several different sites and circulated through several different processes and practices (the cultural circuit)" (10).

The discussions on the life cycle of cultural products bring us to the issues of their specificity. Heirich (1976) distinguishes between fads and cultural breakthroughs. As he explains, fads fit into the framework (created by the industry) with minimal changes or pseudo-changes, like the Yale lock metaphor of Adorno. Cultural breakthroughs re-examine and re-structure the existing framework, transforming some aspects of the framework while still working within it. In contradiction with Adorno and Horkheimer's singular approach, then, Heirich's proposition conveys that both fads – culturally insignificant products made to fit into the economic market with financial concerns – and 'real' cultural breakthroughs co-exist within the industry. Heinrich's rejection of a singular, strict production environment can also be examined in Becker's (1976) analysis. Similar to the nature of cultural breakthroughs that Heirich (1976) defines, Becker (1976) suggests that innovation occurs through the negotiation of conventions – changing some while accepting the rest – as a creative talent orients himself/herself between the authentic art world and commerce.

Heirich's (1976) and Becker's (1976) approaches also suggest that among the vast number of cultural products created within cultural industries, texts with low cultural 'value' and 'originality', and texts that have high cultural 'value' and 'originality' co-exist. They also stress that within cultural industries there is significant space for negotiation and manipulation, which leads to the creation of 'innovative' and 'valuable' cultural products. This, then, signifies the diversity within culture production and opposes any kind of over generalisations. It also demonstrates the strength of, for instance, television's internal variety.

4.2.7 *Cultural Approach to Genre*

Discussions about the 'circuit of culture', specificity of production, variety of television output and professional approaches as well as the significance of social, economic, political, cultural and organisational context that were explored in *chapter three* and *4.1* enrich our understanding of media production. Mittell's (2004) cultural approach takes these discussions one-step further and incorporates them in his analysis. This approach is intrinsic to this thesis as it adopts this framework in its discursive, bottom-up approach to *The League*.

Mittell (2004) uses a cultural approach to TV genre theory[2] that recognises the multiplex nature of production, like many writers mentioned previously. Mittell argues for a view that rejects a simple categorisation of genres, suggesting that genres emerge only from intertextual links between numerous texts. He explains that it is through cultural practices like production and reception that texts interrelate to one another.

Mittell also highlights that while genres are not intrinsic to texts, it is the 'external' elements, such as industrial and audience practices, that constitute them. Yet, the links between these practices and texts themselves are fluid and ever shifting (Mittell 2004). Mittell suggests that one needs to look beyond the text and "locate genres within complex interrelations among texts, industries, audiences and historical context" (173). It is through this complexity; with production, distribution, promotion and reception practices all working to categorise media texts into genres, that genres transect the fluid borders (Mittell 2004).

Mittell argues that conceiving genres as discursive practices is a very fruitful approach, through which one can scrutinise how "various forms of communication work to constitute generic definitions and meanings" (173). Moreover, as Mittell notes, a discursive approach also acknowledges texts as "sites of discursive practice", instead of "bounded and stable objects of analysis" (174). Thus, it underpins a need to "decentre the text as the primary site of genre but not to the extent that we ignore texts completely; media texts still function as important locales of generic discourses

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[2]Genre theory is of particular interest within cultural production (see for instance Born 2004; Hesmondhalgh 2007).

and they must be examined on a par with other sites, such as audience and industrial practices" (Mittell 2004: 174).

Mittell explains that a discursive practice requires very specific and detailed research into a genre at a given historical instance, making use of widespread cultural practices of genre interpretation and definition to raise questions such as: What does a given genre mean for a specific society? Mittell argues that with a bottom up approach – employed by the discursive practice – that focuses on micro-instances of generic discourses in historically specific moments, a more satisfying and complete macro-account of a genre's history can be developed.

Mittell defines five principles of cultural television genre analysis: The need to account for the particular attributes of the medium, to negotiate between specificity and generality, to employ discursive genealogies, the necessity for understanding within cultural practice as well as situating genres within larger systems of cultural hierarchies and power relations. In practical terms what this means is that the production process is a web of interactions between different elements, and thus focusing on only one aspect alone cannot provide a complete understanding. Given the centrality of Mittell's approach, therefore, while analysing texts or aspects of texts (such as genre), it is crucial to position them within the complex interrelations between texts, industries, audiences and historical context.

4.2.8 *Summary of 4.2*

The contextual discussions and historical analysis in *4.1* and *4.2* are highly relevant to all three research questions this thesis aims to answer. They help us understand the creation process of *The League*, the production ecology of the BBC in the context of *The League*, the 1990s broadcasting climate within the BBC, and the general features of television production.

The concepts discussed in *4.2* have set the scene for the analysis of *The League* and the BBC production ecology. They were especially useful in:

- Determining the nature of television production as a process of collaboration.

- Drawing out the concepts that lie at the heart of television production and its working relationships – negotiation, struggle, mutual adjustment and compromise.

- Defining professional roles and working relationships.

- Establishing the specificity of each production and individual practices.

- Emphasising television's internal variety where fads and breakthroughs co-exist.

- Understanding how 'special moments' in TV occur.

- Determining the different factors that impinge production processes.

The relationship between culture/creativity and commerce/economic was at the core of the discussions of production of culture and cultures of production. As mentioned previously, the distinct split between these notions does not account for the BBC's position as a public service broadcaster. However, it is useful in understanding clashes between creative concerns and financial measures. The examples in this chapter demonstrated that concepts such as rationality, realistic approach, manipulation of production norms and negotiation are located at the heart of culture production within media organisations. This indicates that the culture and commerce relationship, whether it is about creative autonomy and the management of creativity within media organisations or the link between texts, industries and audiences, cannot be seen as a complete opposition but as a site of negotiation and ambivalence. This approach rejected the idea of the symbol creator being a 'genius auteur' but recognised them as a primary creative worker within a project team. In this context, media organisations were defined not as mechanical and autonomous corporations with strict rules and regulations but complex, ever-changing and multi-sided organisms.

The discussions suggested that the traditional view of complete autonomy and the constraining role of the producer does not reflect today's conditions. Producers' roles are split between creative and economic concerns that are located in broader cultural and institutional agendas. This suggests that a producer's function is not to constrain creativity but to negotiate between two poles, hence the occupational category 'creative managers'. While these arguments highlight the significance of the division of labour within media organisations, the collaborative creation practice and the relationship between professionals, the importance of individual input cannot be dismissed. The specificity of individual input, the changing nature of cul-

ture industries and the changes in the production processes also assert the specificity of each text. The notion of specificity, however, does not prevent us from forming frameworks about cultural production. This is a key point for the bottom up approach adopted by this thesis.

This chapter proposed that it is still possible to create innovative and expressive works within culture industries. This is achieved though creative manipulation, professionals working through limitations to achieve their goals. It also noted that not all conventions cause limitations and restrictions. The observations on genre, for instance, suggested its functions to be a source of pleasure for creators and viewers as well as being a common ground for the project team to work on.

The discussions indicated that cultural breakthroughs emerge by a) understanding the interaction between economic measures and artistic decisions, b) recognising the 'creative' and the 'economic' as hybrid categories, c) working within organisational systems and recognising the space for creative manipulation, d) understanding that frictions can also be challenging and creatively stimulating, while full autonomy may not be fruitful, and e) working with the 'right' people (e.g. having mutual trust).

4.2 emphasised the complex nature of culture production, and importantly signified the importance of elusive elements such as individual input, work relationships and production environment. This suggested the necessity for meso and micro levels of analysis. The analysis of *The League* in *chapters five*, *six*, *seven* and *eight* employ the key arguments that emerged from this chapter yet also take them one step further.

4.3   The Production Context & The League of Gentlemen

This section provides the basic information about the League of Gentlemen and their productions. It acts as a link between the conceptual and theoretical framework, the methodology and the empirical chapters. It provides the underlying context of the case at hand.

The League of Gentlemen is a quartet of British dark comedy writer/performers formed of Jeremy Dyson, Mark Gatiss, Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith. The writers met during their college years at the beginning of the 1990s. While Gatiss, Pemberton and Shearsmith met at Bretton Hall drama school, Dyson who was study-

ing philosophy at Leeds University was introduced to the others by their mutual friend Gordon Anderson (who later on directed the League in their initial live stage shows) (Thompson 2004; Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i). Gatiss (2011a) explains that the formation of the League quartet was an accident.

After leaving college the creators worked on various projects. Yet, the thing that connected them was the theatre company that they formed together with Anderson and other performers called 606 Theatre (Anderson 2004). The company's productions were very much based on European plays that were non-naturalistic and embodied a sense of the grotesque and absurd (Anderson 2004). Anderson (2004) indicates that especially three of the League members who went to drama college wanted to be 'serious' actors, hence the nature of their training. The plays that they produced reflected that. The company developed steadily and its productions got bigger and bigger. The real break for Anderson – and the theatre company – came in 1994 when he directed a Fringe play. Tom Morris, who was a Timeout critic at the time, offered to take one of their productions into Timeout Critiques' Choice festival called "I Wish I Had Seen That", which was a show that put together all the successful plays at Fringe that year (Anderson 2004; Gatiss 2011a). Anderson realised that he could not put the production back together again on time as all the actors had disbursed. Subsequently, in order to fill the slot he asked the four creators of the League as well as Simon Messingham, who also studied at Bretton Hall, if they would like get together to work on a late night comedy show (Anderson 2004; Hunt 2008; Gatiss 2011a). Anderson thought that the four men would be a great comedy group. This was the beginning of the quartet. However, the group did not have their name at this point. The show they put together was called "This is It!" (Anderson 2004; Hunt 2008). It had a five night run at London's Cockpit Theatre in 1995 (Abery 2002a). In these runs, Dyson was also performing with the other members, yet later on decided to confine himself to writing and was involved on the production side. Dyson notes that their work is so character-based that it requires good acting, and he does not see himself as a 'proper' actor and does not feel comfortable on the stage (Abery 2002a; Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i). A year later, the group started performing at the Canal Café Theatre in London. This was the first time they came together as the League of Gentlemen. In these stage shows, the group performed in tuxedos with minimal

props (see Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2001b; Abery 2002a; Abery 2002b; Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i).

In August 1996, the League took their show to the Edinburgh Fringe, and the show was a success (Thompson 2004; Gatiss 2011a; Pemberton 2012). Returning to London, they put together more shows at Battersea Arts Centre and Canal Café Theatre (Anderson 2004; Thompson 2004; Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i). In 1997 they returned to the Fringe Festival, and this time won the Perrier Comedy Award (Gatiss 2011a). After seeing their show at the Fringe, Sarah Smith, who was a BBC radio producer at the time, approached the group with a deal to develop a radio show with the understanding that if successful a TV series would follow (Abery 2002a). Their radio show (a six-episode run) was broadcast in 1997 on BBC Radio 4 with the name *On the Town with the League of Gentlemen*. The series won the prestigious Sony Radio Silver Award. The series, in a simple sense, was a sketch show. Set in a fictional northern town called Spent, it told the stories of the town's inhabitants.

In 1998 before moving on the TV series, the team put together a short run of live shows at London's Gatehouse Theatre (Abery 2002a). In 1998 production for the television series began. The show was titled *The League of Gentlemen*. The name of the town, which the series was set, changed to Royston Vasey. While Smith stayed on as the producer, she was accompanied by Jemma Rodgers as her associate producer and Jon Plowman as the executive producer. The programme ran for three series from 1999 to 2002 – including a Christmas Special in 2000 – and broadcast on BBC 2 (BFI 2004). After the first season Smith left the production team and Rodgers took over the whole production (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i). Apart from this there were no other major changes in the production crew. Other production credits include Steve Bendelack as the director, Yves Barre as the costume designer, Grenville Horner as the production designer, Rob Kitzmann as the director of photography and Joby Talbot as the composer. In season three Mike Nicholson was added to the team as the storyboard artist (see Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005a). The series won several awards including BAFTA, Golden Rose and Royal Television awards (BFI 2004). It followed the sketch show format, yet hybridised several other genres into it such as horror and drama (see Binding 2000). Graham (1999) describes the series as "a grotesque comic soap opera" (143). While Abery (2002b) characterises the show's comedy style as a "heart-breaking comedy of disappointment, celebrating the under-dog and the

grotesque, strictly without sentimentality" (20), Hunt (2008) identifies it with a new kind of regionalism in which the north becomes prominent.

In 2001 the group had their first major UK tour called *The League of Gentlemen – A Local Show for Local People*. It was in a similar format to their initial stage performances (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2001b). In 2005 *The League of Gentlemen's Apocalypse*, a feature-length film was released. Their second UK tour took place in 2006. It was a pantomime stage show titled *The League of Gentlemen Are Behind You!*. Since then the team moved on to new projects in television, theatre, cinema and literature. They still collaborate in various projects (not just the writers but also the production team) such as *Psychoville* (BBC2, 2009–11) that was written and performed by Pemberton and Shearsmith. Similar to the televisions series, the executive producer was Jon Plowman, Yves Barre designed the costumes and Joby Talbot composed the music for the series.

LOCATION & SENSE OF PLACE IN THE LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN

This chapter examines the formation and function of location in *The League*. It explores the creation of the town Spent in the radio series, and Royston Vasey in the television series. By mapping the development of these spaces the chapter primarily provides insight into *research question one* – How did the creation process of *The League of Gentlemen* develop? – and *research question two* – How does the television production ecology work within the BBC with particular reference to *The League of Gentlemen* as a case study? It charts the influential factors (from all levels – macro, meso and micro) in this process, and looks at the commissioning, production and filming stages. The analysis also contributes to answering *research question three* – 'How did "special moments" in television, such as *The League of Gentlemen*, emerge in the BBC during the 1990s, a decade that is considered to be "infertile" by some researchers (e.g. Born 2004)?' – through discussions on creative autonomy, individual input and individual practices.

The analysis reveals that having a location allowed the show to offer something new yet familiar in each season. This enabled the TV series to be commissioned for three seasons. The chapter underlines that these texts' location – the northern geography – springs from inspirational texts, the writers' personal experiences and shared northern backgrounds. The influences of observational comedy, drama, gothic and horror genres, conjure up a representation of a small northern town as a landscape that embraces elements from all these genres. Here, the overarching theme is how authenticity, especially in the northern context, is formed by attentiveness to everyday life.

The chapter illustrates that the differences between Spent and Royston Vasey lie 'behind the scenes', in factors such as the media the shows were created for, channel

tone, production conditions, artistic vision as well as changes in the broader social, cultural, economic and historical background (e.g. the way 'The North', London, urban and rural are acknowledged in the popular imagination).

The analysis demonstrates that the core idea behind the fictional town Royston Vasey was created by the writers and then shaped by production conditions and individual practices of other contributors. It illustrates that elements such as artistic concerns, technical requirements, economic affairs, individual input and serendipity were all influential in choosing the filming location, the town Hadfield.

The analysis scrutinises the reasons behind filming the studio sessions at Yorkshire Television Studios and how this influenced the filming process, concentrating on issues around creative autonomy and collaborative input. Closely related to the discussions in *chapter four*, it explores the influence of the industrial and organisational context on the production practices and artistic vision. The analysis shows that organisational and economic restrictions can lead to fruitful artistic outcomes. It also reveals that professionals can manipulate the system to reach their creative goals.

5.1   Birth of the Idea of the Town – Not just another sketch show

This section explores how the idea of having a location in the shows came about. The key argument here is that the town was a pivotal element that allowed the series to offer something different yet familiar. As a textual element the location formed a focal point that offered a sense of familiarity while it also acted as a 'blank slate' that presented the opportunity to build something new in each season without breaking the continuum.

When the team started to work on the radio show in 1998 they already had extensive material as they had been doing live shows and had been writing intensely since 1994. Their radio show comprised a collection of these sketches, adapted for radio along with some new material that was written specifically for the medium (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i). However, between 1994 and 1998 the idea of having all the characters living in one place did not exist. As Pemberton (Interview 2012)

states, they were more interested in the characters and adapted what was essentially a sketch-show.

At this point, the sketches and the characters were not linked by a common denominator in textual terms. Working on the radio show, Sarah Smith, their producer, suggested setting all the sketches in one place. As Plowman notes, "They [the League] had the characters and the style but it was the producer, Sarah Smith, to her absolute credit who engineered them coming up with the clinging thing of setting it all in one place" (cited in Keighron 2003: 21). Pemberton explains, " ... she [Smith] said, 'You know we need a vehicle for these characters. We don't just want it to be *The Fast Show*'" (Interview 2012). Reece Shearsmith explains:

> ... it was a very simple idea really just to think, 'Let's house all our sketches and just place them all in a town and have a geography to it'. That's how Spent on the radio came about. And it was kind of an experiment really for the radio ... (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i)

Shearsmith adds, "That [the town] became the interesting thing, I think, in a lot of people's eyes, about this programme *The League of Gentlemen*" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i). Shearsmith's observations show how this 'unexpected' element, the location and having a 'sense of place', became one of the key points of its success and originality. With the characters constituting the core, other elements such as place were, at first, seen as 'devices' to enable the writers to achieve their goals and create deeper characters. As this 'experiment' worked for radio, a more sophisticated approach was taken for the television incarnation. On the significance of the town for the TV show, Pemberton explains:

> ... we were very much focused on the characters. I mean we were all surprised by how the location took on a character of its own. We kept saying, 'Well, you know, what makes the place is the people.' ... We did draw a map ... So we did create the place, we did talk a lot about the geography of it and what was there but we didn't really think of it having its own personality. The personality took us by surprise, the fact that it was there. And it did come of course through the characters. (Interview 2012)

In 2001 Pemberton stressed how re-structuring the show by setting the characters in a specific place elevated the narrative, the characters and the format (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i). While the first and second seasons followed the same format, roughly described as a sketch-show, the Christmas Special and the third season employed completely different formats. While some key characters from the first season continued to appear in the second season, a good chunk of new characters were introduced. On the Christmas Special, however, *The League* embodied a distinctly British portmanteau film format, which focused on three short stories that were linked by a common theme and textual devices. This was inspired from the Amicus horror films that the writers loved (Rigby 2005) (*chapter three*). The third series also employed a different framework, which took the sketch-show format to new heights. Here, the overall narrative was based on a smaller group of characters and had greater narrative and character development than the first two series. In this way the show was transformed into serial form.

Pemberton explains that what they did with the Christmas Special, apart from embodying a new format, was "raising some of the characters who've been on the fringes of the show, raising them up and letting them have more of a story" (Interview 2012). Pemberton explains that they approached the third series with the same kind of outlook they had in the Christmas Special, raising new narratives and new characters or turning minor characters into main characters. Pemberton adds, "So that's very interesting and that's the beauty of having a town … You are not dependent upon any one set of characters or you ought to be" (Interview 2012). Thus, although the writers were more interested in the characters, having a town was the element that enabled them to develop their characters, creating new ones as well as 'raising' some minor ones and telling their stories. Having a town enabled them to start a new season with, in Pemberton's words, "a completely blank sort of slate" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i). Having the location as a common denominator throughout the series, enabled the writers to play with the format, the narrative and the characters.

This idea takes us to a key aspect of TV commissioning, which writers, producers, commissioners and controllers are looking for: something new yet familiar (see Lumsden Interview 2011). The location played an important part in the commissioning of *The League*. Talking about the creation process for season two, Gatiss notes, "You've got to carry on with the things that people are expecting, but you have to

give them something new" (cited in Miller 2000: 9). For example, the first season of the TV show starts off with Benjamin, a young man, coming to Royston Vasey to visit his relatives and meet his friend to go on a hiking trip. The second season introduces Papa Lazarou, the owner of the carnival arriving in the town, while the third season starts off with the 'resurrection' of the show's signature characters Tubbs and Edwards – as season two ends with the suggestion that they might be dead – and continues with their sudden and this time absolute death within seconds, which again taps into the idea of introducing something new and familiar.

While Gatiss' comments reflect the writerly perspective on this issue, Lumsden (Interview 2011), the commissioner, offers the organisational side. She suggests that unless it is a complete flop, most BBC 2 series get a second season. However, it is the demanding third season that seems to be the tricky stage. During this critical commissioning process there are several elements at play: audience attraction, ratings, economic, artistic, industrial and organisational concerns, which determine the destiny of a show.[1]

Lumsden (Interview 2011) sets the limits of what's 'allowable' for commissioning new seasons. The key concern, which applies across the BBC, is to be able to justify the licence fee. While there is no single answer, it can be roughly calculated based on the broadcast channel, the expected ratings and the money invested. For Lumsden the crucial questions that need to be answered for a show to be commissioned for a third season are:

> Is it really going to get more out of the third series? Is it growing? Or is it now where we kind of know our story and it's found its audience but that audience is just a little bit too small for BBC 2? (Interview 2011)

Stability and growth being the key terms in commissioning, the main argument here is the need for a show to have the potential to be able to bring back audiences by offering familiarity yet also something refreshing whether this is in terms of narrative, character development or format. In this case, location is one of the important factors behind getting *The League* commissioned for a third season (see also Murphy Interview 2011).

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[1]*Chapter eight* points to another key element, the individual practice. See also *chapter four*.

5.1.1   *Radio Show: On the Town with the League of Gentlemen*

Pemberton explains that for radio, initially they had two ideas, one of which became what we know as *On the Town with The League of Gentlemen* (Interview 2012). Pemberton explains:

> ... we had two ideas. One, which was our favourite idea, that it would be a very deliberately old fashioned, go along with the tuxedos, it would feel like a 1940s radio show along the lines of *ITMA* [*It's that Man Again*] and those kind of war time radio shows. And we presented it with a kind of man at a microphone you know, because it was a radio show we wanted to plug in to all those radio ideas. So that was one idea. Now a secondary idea that we weren't as keen on was they could all live in the same place. (Interview 2012)

Pemberton notes that the characters all living in one place felt quite limiting for the writers at the time because that meant that some of the sketches they already had would not fit in to that format:

> So because of that reason we were more pushing our first idea and it was certainly Sarah Smith who said, 'No, I think you should go away and develop the idea that they all live in the same place'. And that's what we settled on. And I really wasn't sure about it because I thought that was quite limiting but history has proved that I was wrong there. (Interview 2012)

One of the strands that they needed to abandon for this format was the local shop, which later became the signature of the series (Pemberton Interview 2012). Pemberton (Interview 2012) believed that these characters needed a visual medium and could not be fully represented orally. Pemberton also notes:

> One of the things that Sarah said was 'What you leave out is as important as what you put in'. So we focused on the people who could live in this small Northern town. And it took a life of it's own. (Interview 2012)

The birth of the town links us back to the discussions in *chapter four*. Here, what we observe is the collaborative nature of media production, and especially the signif-

icance of the producer-writer relationship. It also demonstrates the creative side of the producer's role and challenges the view that the producer is a restricting force on artistic vision.

5.2   Spent vs. Royston Vasey / Radio vs. Television

While both the radio and television incarnations of the show embodied a sense of place and depicted a small Northern town, it is worth noting that there were important differences between these two incarnations. These differences are deeply embedded in the nature of each medium as well as the channels where they were broadcast. Therefore in examining the divide between Spent and Royston Vasey it is necessary to approach it in two ways: on screen (textual meaning) and off screen (creative process) distinctions. This section scrutinises how 'behind the scenes' elements – production conditions, commissioning processes, organisational concerns, artistic goals, childhood experiences, individual inspirations – influence the textual meanings and artistic style. Thus, the main question is: what did radio and television add to or subtract from these key factors? Examining the commissioning process of the Radio 4 series this section explores the influence of Radio 4's channel tone and scheduling on the tone of the show and what the town Spent stood for.

Pemberton identifies the shows closely with their locations, showing that they embody the spirit and the style of the shows they appear in (Interview 2012). Scrutinising the differences between the radio and the TV show, Pemberton describes Spent as being "a bit more Radio 4" (Interview 2012). Interestingly, drawing a line between Radio 4 and BBC 2, Pemberton describes the radio show and the town it depicted as being quirky yet benign and more slapstick. This, he notes, is mainly due to the time slot in which the show was broadcast which defines the nature of the Radio 4 audience tuning in at that time of the day, "what we were creating was a show that was going out at six thirty, just before *The Archers*" (Interview 2012).

While Pemberton's review suggests that the radio show was not able to fully embody the 'darkness' of the League and brands Radio 4 as having a more light hearted nature – compared to BBC 2 – ironically Plowman offered a different account of the channel and programme tone:

It was insane! I mean because they put them on, I think, originally at six thirty on Thursdays … And it's very dark to be on that early in a way. You know, pre-watershed and post-watershed. … I remember driving home one night and listening to the show and thinking 'God! This is extraordinary stuff.' (Interview 2012)

Plowman's remarks show how *On the town* stood out from other shows broadcast in this time slot. This might signify Radio 4's willingness to step outside conventional norms by broadcasting a show with an unorthodox nature, which portrayed sketches about unconventional topics such as dead children, a murderer who carries around his dead wife in a suitcase, a theatre play about homosexuality aimed at five to nine year olds and a transvestite cab driver named Barbara who, in a very graphic fashion, talks about his/her sex change operation (see Plowman Interview 2012). Although Pemberton recognises that they had to bring their style down a notch for the radio slot and adjust to the 'lighter' temperament of Radio 4, Plowman's remarks show that it was not entirely tamed. *On the Town*, no matter how toned down it was, stood out against standard broadcast items. Broadcasting *On the Town* at 6.30 p.m. right before *The Archers* (BBC Radio 4, 1967-present) – the longest running broadcast drama in the world (see BBC 2010) – illustrates that Radio 4 was determined to satisfy both older and younger audiences.

5.2.1   *What is in a Name?*

Exploring the change in the town's name, from Spent to Royston Vasey, provides reasons to examine the influence of production conditions – e.g. the nature of the medium, the producers' influence on creative decisions, collaboration and creative autonomy – on the textual meaning, as well as style, tone and artistic aim. After creating the town for the radio series, the writers made a list of possible town names (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005b). This list included both Spent and Royston Vasey (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i). Dyson and Pemberton indicate that their producer Sarah Smith did not think the name Royston Vasey was appropriate for the radio as she thought it was too long (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i). Gatiss explains that although Spent seemed right at first "after a while it started to sound like a com-

edy Northern name instead" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i). Pemberton adds further detail: "Spent ... It was a linguistic joke because it had two meanings – being like spent, worn out. We weren't quite happy with that, the fact that we were commenting on the place. We decided to rename it" (Interview 2012). Dyson explains their thoughts about Royton Vasey, "we really liked it because of the fact that it was the double joke, it sounding like a strange place, strange northern place and it being Chubby Brown's real name" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i). Pemberton also adds, "We thought 'What a great gag, what a great inside gag for people who know it.' And it stuck and it was one of those instant things" (Interview 2012).

The writers believed that Royston Vasey managed to maintain the feeling that the writers were aiming for, yet, as opposed to Spent, did not make any comments on it nor embodied the 'It's grim up north' cliché. This is an essential aspect of *The League* that comes across both in narrative and character as well as the location. Royston Vasey implied a deeper level of meaning and demands something more than an average television viewing activity – more attention and in some cases knowledge. For a sense of place these elements offer a deeper level of meaning and a 'hidden gag' as Royston Vasey is the name of a famous northern comedian. Pemberton's remarks showcase key concerns about the notion of geography – the importance of not commenting on the subject, representing it as it is and being authentic yet innovative, "... we certainly didn't want it to be seen as a satire on the North or as anything other than just a specific presentation of a small Northern town" (Interview 2012).

Pemberton's accounts also link to the next section, the creation of this series' northern geography. It focuses on how their understanding of north emerged and the aspects behind their artistic aspirations which included refraining from clichés of the north of England and creating a specific fictional town (Interview 2012).

5.3   Imagining Royston Vasey: Land of embarrassment and gothic

'The land of embarrassment and breakfast.'
Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot*

In the 2006 live pantomime show *The League of Gentlemen Are Behind You!*, one of the characters, Ollie Plimsoles – the writer, director, producer, lead actor and founder of the Legz Akimbo Theatre Company (see Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2001a) – says, "For years, writers have sat on their fat arses, getting rich writing lies about real northern people! I want to do that, too" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2006). Through this the League certainly makes a statement about their style and perspective on the representation of the north. As Gatiss explains, "We are always hesitant about being Northern with a capital N..." (cited in Graham 2000: 29). These examples underline the writers' sensitivity about stereotypical comedy representations and journalistic clichés about the north of England (or 'North of Watford'), Northernness and Northern sense of humour (Hunt 2008). Hence they do not associate themselves with what conventional popular wisdom tends to typify as 'northernness' and 'northern' comedy (see Graham 2000; Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i; Hunt 2008). Nevertheless, the writers are all from the north of England, which is one of the aspects that enabled their particular style to emerge – that is to represent something as it is rather than commenting on it[2] – and differentiated their show(s) from cliché representations. Thus, as Plowman asserts, the writers wrote about what they know, which then allowed them to form a sense of authenticity (Interview 2012).

The writers' backgrounds, however, were influenced by certain inspirational works through which they developed their artistic tone, style and perspective. The long list of inspirations included a great variety from gothic, horror, comedy to drama. These inspirations helped the team create a specific place that is both familiar and extraordinary. The writers acknowledged the integral role of gothic and horror for *The League* (see Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i; Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2007).

Although the League embodies elements from different genres, their work should still be considered observational comedy. The team hybridise various genre conventions such as sketch-show, sit-com, horror, gothic, drama and even soap opera, which bring certain dimensions into their style such as a sense of extraordinary, grotesque and exaggeration. However, the essence of their writing flourishes on observations of 'real life', especially in a northern context. Nevertheless, some critics describe *The League* as 'surreal'. The writers do not agree with such comments. For example, after reading The Daily Mail's review for series three that ends with: "... it is deeply

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[2]See Plowman, Pemberton and Barre Interviews 2012

unfunny. Perhaps I need to be taught surrealism." Gatiss responds in fury, "Oh, I fucking hate that word! Is Dali in it?!" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i). These remarks link us back to the discussion in *chapter two* about English Gothic and its intrinsic place in English culture. *The League* is our "reminder of how deeply embedded the ideas introduced and elaborated by Gothic writers still are in the English consciousness ..." (Pirie 2008: 221) and embodies the gothic elements such as an interest in excess and exaggeration, visual/emotional appeal of ruins, fascination with the irrational and chaos, a sense of surrealism and the notion of 'otherness'. It also reminds us that the gothic tradition did not just fuel contemporary works of art and literature but leaked into the roots of English society and daily life. This becomes apparent in the depiction of Royston Vasey. According to Gatiss:

> There is sort of a strain of Gothic in our lives, very much rooted in real experience. One of my first vivid recollections is seeing a play by Alan Bennett called *Our Winnie* and it was Elizabeth Springs taking her mentally handicapped daughter to a crematorium for the day. And I remember just thinking 'How does he know?' I just know all these people. I know everything about this. I know the grimness of this Sunday. (Gatiss 2011b)

Gatiss also remind us of the connection between gothic and comedy, especially the comedy of embarrassment that is clearly visible in Alan Bennett's works:

> I remember thinking 'God! This is somehow my experience of my life without being specific.' It was just like, every detail was so funny and so sad at the same time. (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i)

For the League apart from Bennett, the works of Victoria Wood and Stephen Frears also embody a sense of authenticity – especially in a northern context – which is manifested in attentiveness to the bleakness of life (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2007). The themes of loneliness, death and illness, which come up in these writers' works also form the foundations of many successful League sketches (see Dyson 2000). Dyson focuses on the notion of authenticity particularly in terms of representations of the north of England and its connection to comedy:

> Bennett's plays seemed to confirm something else too – that there was something about the North, when presented authentically, that was in-

trinsically funny. Rising Damp, Les Dawson and Victoria Wood all corroborated this. But equally there is something about the North, when it is presented as cliché, that is excruciating. Since we are all from the North (Chorley, Leeds, Northumberland, Hull) we recognised when others got it right. Never is the phrase 'write what you know' truer than when applied to comedy and that's why The League has its northern setting too. (Dyson 2000: 2)

5.4 The North of England

This section examines the northern essences in Spent and Royston Vasey. *5.4.1* further discusses the influences of the writers' personal experiences on the depiction of a small northern town and its authenticity. *5.4.2* examines the definition of 'North' in English culture and its connection to the League's depictions. Closely related to the discussions on 'Englishness' in *chapter three*, it underlines how location establishes different cultural and visual identities.

5.4.1 *North by personal experiences*

As emphasised in the previous section, the 'extraordinary' and the grimness the team reflect in their works are deeply embedded in the writers' lives. Their experiences were what their representations flourished on, which were then moulded and infused by their literary, performance (theatre, magic, pantomime), comics, film and televisual influences. Their northern upbringing was an important element that enabled the writers to portray a small northern town, northern geography and northernness – its visual and cultural identity – in an authentic manner.

How these experiences were infused into their creations needs to be explored through concrete examples. For instance, three of the writers, Gatiss, Pemberton and Shearsmith all studied at the Bretton Hall drama college located in west Yorkshire. The way they describe this place resembles a typical horror film setting. Gatiss notes, "... it is a very strange place. It is a stately home as was and a beautiful sort of landscaped place but real pressure cooker sort of environment. No escape!" (Dyson,

Gatiss et al. 2005i). The college is in an isolated location surrounded by pastoral green fields. The local village next door was a temperance village, where there were no pubs. There was also a desanctified church near by. Pemberton notes, "… every Halloween we used to look out and see if witches were there" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i).

The writers' representation of the countryside has clearly been influenced by their experiences here, an idyllic place that seems to be disconnected from the world and immersed in gothic. While Gatiss describes it as a *Wicker Man* like community – one of the most influential films on their writing, which tells the story of a closed sinister community in the fictional island Summerisle located off the western coast of Scotland – Pemberton suggests how believable this kind of representation is even though it might sound farfetched (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i). This takes us back to Gatiss' remarks on the existence of gothic in our daily lives.

Dyson notes that people who grew up in urban environments find the country-side foreign and spooky. He describes the places they grew up in as edges of towns, which were stuck in between urban and rural (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005d). This idea brings out two different aspects: a) to neighbour other towns, and b) being stuck be-tween urban and rural spaces. The first idea brings the notion of 'localness' to mind, which is one of the major focal themes, especially in the TV series, represented mainly through the local shop sketches and been reasserted through other characters such as Dentons (a local family who are not fond of having 'guests' in the house) and Papa Lazarou (an eerie stranger who brings his 'freak show' to Royston Vasey). As dis-cussed in *chapter three*, this split between the local and the other is deeply rooted in the pastoral understanding and the classic statement of the country-city opposition where the countryside is associated with tradition and tranquillity, and needs to be protected from the 'savage' outsiders. The term 'outsiders' covers a very large spec-trum here, encompassing the rest of the world whether it is the French, Londoners or the residents of the next village, and is deeply rooted in the 'otherness' of English Identity (as discussed in *3.2.1*) (see Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i; Higson 2006).

The second meaning that is implied by living on the edge of a town is about em-bodying opposing notions of urban and rural. Farley and Roberts define these spaces as 'edgelands' and describe this term as, "the fringes of English towns and cities, where urban and rural negotiate and renegotiate their borders" (2012: 4–5). Similar

Figure 1: "Welcome to Royston Vasey. You'll Never Leave" – Season One Episode One

to the League, these two authors grew up at the edge of two northern cities, Liverpool and Manchester. They define the aim of their book in such a manner that correlates to *The League*:

> Our book is an attempt to celebrate these spaces, to break out the duality of rural and urban landscape writing, to explore these unobserved parts of shared landscape as places of possibility, mystery and beauty. (Farley and Roberts 2012: 6)

Royston Vasey is also a celebration of 'edgelands', as it breaks the duality of urban and rural spaces – with the help of horror and gothic traditions as places of possibility, mystery and the grotesque.

As an island nation the idea of an 'edge' space seems to have a certain significance in English culture (Farley and Roberts 2012), hence an edge space or 'edgeland' becomes a common understanding in the popular imagination. It perhaps heightens the tendency to separate spaces like urban and rural as in coast and ocean (Farley and Roberts 2012: 261). Examining their representations of space, it is apparent that

both the League, particularly in the TV incarnation, and Farley and Roberts (2012: 2), question the strict division between the countryside and urban space. This, as Hutchings (2004) suggests, is a common perspective in contemporary horror texts (*chapter three*).

As mentioned in 5.2, the depictions of Spent and Royston Vasey were different because of production factors. These differences manifest themselves in textual terms. The most significant one being the degree of integration of urban and rural spaces in these depictions, Spent seems to fall short in blurring the distinction of two spaces, as well as the notions and identities that are attached to them. While Spent comes across as a small Northern town in industrial decay, Royston Vasey takes Spent's depiction to the next level, representing a decaying Northern town, stuck between urban and rural spaces. For example, one minute into the first episode (right after the opening credits), the League, through the voice of Spent's radio presenter paints a very clear picture of the town:

> Good morning, its 9:15, I am Bernice Woodall and you are listening to 'Hours of Agony' on Spent Fm. Well, it's another day here in the lovely town of Spent. As I look out of my window through the sheet rain I think to myself, 'Aren't we lucky that you can live here where you can see the very air that you breath?' (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2002)

On the other hand, the spirit of the town Spent, its geography and community are introduced by the first sketch of the show that takes place before the opening credits. This scene is set at the town's train station as Benjamin, who, as the audience will later on discover, comes to Spent for a job interview at the plant and stays with his relatives during this time.

> GUARD: Spent, this is Spent! All change please! All change! Can you have your tickets ready for inspection?
> BEN: Excuse me, I wonder if you can help me…?
> GUARD: Just a sec… Can I see your ticket please Sister?
> SISTER: Oh yes of course. I was just in such a rush to get back to the convent. There you are. Goodbye!
> GUARD: Just a minute love, what's this? Admit One Lightwater Valley? Wrong ticket love.

SISTER: I'm so terribly sorry. What must you think of me? Here it is. Good day to you!

GUARD: Ah-ah hang on. This is the ten of clubs Sister.

SISTER: How silly. Would this be it?

GUARD: Yes... Thank you.

Sister Meg: Goodbye!

GUARD: Now, can I help you?

BEN: Yes, I was wondering how often the trains go back to London?

GUARD: London?

BEN: Yes.

GUARD: Once in a blue moon.

BEN: What?

GUARD: And that's not the worst of it.

BEN: What do you mean?

GUARD: I think that Nun just nicked your ticket. Tickets please! (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2002)

While the mischievous nun sets the tone of the series, Spent comes across as a partially corrupted place where things do not work as they do in the civil urban space, which is represented by London, since Benjamin, as a stranger from London, takes on the role of the innocent victim. The characterisation of the guard also represents the other side of the town, a kind of Northern playfulness and sense of humour (see Dyson 2000). The limited train service to London, the city that is the ultimate urban city in the popular imagination[3], or perhaps almost the non-existence of it, distinguishes Spent as a disconnected location, a space and community distinctly separated from the 'main land'. Similar to the island in *The Wicker Man* that was separated from the main land – the civilisation – by the sea, the town of Spent is separated from civilisation by lack of train service. Here railways signify civilisation and the ultimate connection to the urban space where, supposedly, life proceeds in a regular routine. In a way this fits into the south-based viewers' notion of 'Up North'. Focusing on this north/south divide, Maconie gives voice to this southern view, " 'Up North' is a long way away. You wouldn't want to go there. It is a long trip" (Maconie 2008: 8). Examining the state of such perceptions at the beginning of the millennium,

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[3]See Nicholson Interview 2012; Maconie 2008

the author asks, "Does that two and a half hour journey from London to Manchester or Leeds still feel like crossing time zones, political borders and linguistic and cultural frontiers?" (Maconie 2008: xii). The first two sketches of *On the town* establish that at the turn of the century, this abstract and transparent barrier still stands.

Royston Vasey also shares this sentiment, embedded in its textual meaning, as the detached and strange (different than London) Northern town which is, again, established right at the beginning of the show – even before the title sequence. Similarly, this opening sketch is also about Benjamin arriving in the town, this time to Royston Vasey, yet with a different purpose – to meet up with his friend to go on a hiking trip. This scene takes place on the train to Royston Vasey.

> *Scene 1:1/1 ext. Bleak Countryside + Train Day.*
>
> A train steams over a viaduct and speeds through desolate-looking countryside. It is raining. Over this we hear:
>
> OLD LADY: (V/O) Dear Benjamin, we're so glad you are coming to stay with us if only for the night …
>
> *Scene 1:2/2 Int. Train. Day.*
>
> A young man, Ben, who looks like a student – sits reading a letter to himself. The voice-over continues.
>
> OLD LADY: (OOV) I hope that you and your friend enjoy your hiking holiday and don't find our little town too boring. We have never been camping as Uncle Harvey does not get on with chemical toilets.
>
> We pull back to reveal that an old lady sitting next to Ben is simply reading his letter out loud.
>
> OLD LADY: Still, we will be thrilled to see you …
>
> BEN: Do you mind? It's private.
>
> The old lady stops and looks out the window. A voice comes over the loudspeaker.
>
> L/SPEAKER: (V/O) We are now approaching Royston Vasey. This is the end of the line. (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2003: 15)

Again the scene serves as an introduction to the town, its geography and inhabitants. The old lady, who inappropriately reads Benjamin's letter out loud, becomes the descendent of the nun in the radio series. Similar to Spent, Royston Vasey is depicted as a place far away from the city, not only in social and cultural terms through the unexpected and inappropriate behaviours of its inhabitants, but also through the sheer geographic distance, being at 'the end of the line'. However, both the image of the bleak countryside and the purpose of Benjamin's arrival set the difference in the meanings that are negotiated by this northern territory. Benjamin is not coming to find a job in a factory but to go on a hiking trip, which puts the town in a new context, the rural landscape. This idea is played out in full with the second sketch, the local shop. The countryside and its association to monstrosity, eeriness and grotesqueness reach new heights (see Hutchings 2004; Hunt 2008).

Figure 2: Benjamin arrives to Royston Vasey: "The Last Stop" – Season One Episode One

The aspect that is embodied in both incarnations is industrial decay and unemployment (see *chapter three*). In both towns there is only one symbol of industry, a plant in Spent and a plastic factory in Royston Vasey. It is quite significant that among all the shops the writers chose the Jobcentre as one of the key signatures of

their towns. The main characters in this strand are Pauline, the restart officer, as well as Mickey and Ross, two of the men in the restart course. In the second job seekers sketch of the radio series Mickey walks in to the restart course with a letter in his hand, announcing that he needs to leave the class to attend a job interview. After reading the letter, Pauline utters, "Is this a joke?" Mickey responds in excitement, "It's for a job!" Pauline replies, "Don't be stupid Mickey! There are no jobs in Spent. Someone is having you on" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2002). In the TV series, a similar statement is made. In the first jobseekers sketch (season one episode one), Pauline asks, "Now we were thinking yesterday – weren't we – about jobs. Do you remember? And what did we conclude?" Ross replies, "There aren't any?" Annoyed by Ross's answer, Pauline then starts a brainstorming session to make a list of possible job options. She says, "... me and Mr Pen are walking down the High Street where we see lots of people doing lots of jobs." Ross interrupts, "It's not our High Street then" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005a). As will be explored in *chapter six*, restart office sketches were also inspired by the writers' personal experiences.

5.4.2 *Geography of Royston Vasey: Where is* The North?

Maconie argues that the viewers in the south see the north as a vague and colourful region and for them, "It's ok to be blithely approximate about northern geography" (Maconie 2008: 8). Maconie suggests that this vagueness encompasses other regions, and types of Englishness, because of the centrality of London and the South. For those based in the south, the images, and sounds of Middle and North England seem to fall into the same category – 'North of Watford'. Once the heart of England, Middle England is now joined to the 'doomed north' against the 'cultivated' London (Maconie 2010). This shows that landscape is a major signifier. It defines different kinds of English cultural identities and establishes distinct visual identities.

Mike Nicholson, the storyboard artists, explains that *The League* taps into certain visual elements that are associated with the vague 'Northern' depiction in public imagination:

> *The League...* it looks too sort of wet and sort of grimy, the buildings
> have a certain look that I would recognise from the mill towns and those

industrial towns that sprang up in the industrial revolution. (Interview 2012)

It seems that this detailed geography created by the writers not only reflects – and of course affects – the soul of the town but also the emotions and behaviours of individuals. The bleak countryside view Benjamin sees through the train window as he approaches Royston Vasey, the sheer distance from the city, rundown factories, wastelands, a very short high-street, the council estates, farm houses and suburban houses surrounded by moors create a certain atmosphere. This atmosphere influences the behaviours and attitudes of inhabitants.

The northern geography of Royston Vasey and its surroundings was not accidental. Pemberton (Interview 2012) points to the scrapbook, *A Local Book for Local People* as an example of the thought processes that went into the creation, visualisation and representation of this specific geography. Comprised of maps, doodles sketches, flyers, brochures, posters, and newspaper press clippings, *A Local Book for Local People* is distinguished as the scrapbook of Tubbs, one of the signature characters of the TV series. It gives detailed insight into the distinct visual and regional identity of this town.

One of the included items is Royston Vasey's tourist brochure accompanied by a letter from the Major of the town, Larry Vaughn. In the letter, Major Vaughn explains why this brochure was put together:

> We have complied this beautiful brochure in order to arouse your interest (not unlike the tit mags Pop keeps behind his copies of Total Film) and maybe encourage you to bring your business to Royston Vasey. Many small businesses already thrive here – just ask Nicole who can always be found hanging around outside Burger Me after dark. (Shes a lovely lass with a fine pair of milk-shooters and can take it right down to the tonsils if you know what I mean gents.) (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2001a)[4]

This excerpt from the letter says a lot about this place. It states that the town is in need of financial investment. Although, Major Vaughn does not fully recognise this, the town is incapable of creating economic uplift.

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[4]*A Local Book for Local People* is filled with typos. The spelling mistakes in quotes are taken from the original.

The brochure looks as dreary and rough as the town itself. Filled with typos, with no coherent font or font size, it breaks all the basic design rules of aesthetic attraction, refinement, practicality, and order. In a sense this fits perfectly with the essence of the town, which is, dysfunctional, chaotic and 'broken'.

Ironically, the brochure describes Royston Vasey as, "Set amidst the gentle rolling hills of the Vale of Tiers, known for its equable weather and mediterranean ambiance – Royston Vasey is a town like no other." (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2001a) and continues with the history of the town. Although it offers rather unbelievable accounts, they still seem to fit in with the on screen representation of the 20th century – and the Edwardian depiction of the town showcased in the Christmas Special.

From an economic perspective, the town is equally inept, "Local industry at that time centred on pig's wool, together with Knuckle-Scrape – a kind of jam derived form porcine filth" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2001a). Looking at Royston Vasey's 15th century inhabitants' strange attempts to grow wool on pigs, it is clear that this is the result of the inability of its 20th century inhabitants to come up with 'normal' and successful business ventures. The tourist brochure adds further detail:

> Then, in 1642, like every other community in England, civil war came to Royston Vasey. After suffering endless, pointless attempts to grow wool on them, the pigs rose up against their cruel human masters. Setting up an animal's republic with other dissatisfied creatures including otters, bears and silverfish, their insurrection was eventually overcome when they were simply rounded up in a barn and set on fire. (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2001a)

This paragraph highlights two key features of the town: too close proximity to nature, and brutality. The hostile nature of the town is then firmly established:

> A short time after this, Royston Vasey played host to a tribe of American Indians – the Nick Nacks. They had arrived from the New World with the town's very own founding fathers who, disenchanted, had returned after only a week in their ship The Woolly Pig. Keen to foster relations with the mysterious newcomers the townsfolk robbed and killed the Nick Nacks before burying them in quicklime. Indeed much of modern day

Royston Vasey is built on this, the only Red Indian Burial Ground in
Britain. (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2001a)

All this information sums up the characteristics of Royston Vasey: unconventional
approaches to work and pleasure, crudeness, low living standards, a close proximity
to nature, hostility and lack of development. These specific characteristics encapsu-
lated in the tourist brochure and the TV programme reinforce the notion of some-
where that is *not* London – a rather broad definition that encompasses a supposedly
Mediterranean climate, an Indian burial ground, and a strange fascination with pigs.

Throughout the series, small gags appear in the background of main sketches pro-
viding a backdrop, which allows the audience to construct a specific geography and
view of what Royston Vasey's inhabitants are like. The first example is from season
two. In this sketch Herr Lipp, a German school teacher, arrives in Royston Vasey
with a group of teenagers on a school trip. In the first half of the sketch, the coach
drives through the moors. In the script the writers describe the landscape that can
be seen from the coach window as "barren and drizzly moors" (Dyson, Gatiss et al.
2003: 201). In the second part of the sketch the coach drives through the town:

Scene 2:2/18 Int. Coach. Day

Herr Lipp stands at the front of the coach with a microphone.

HERR LIPP: I dunno if you have gazed your eyes upon my pink pomplet
[Herr Lipp's pronunciation of pamphlet]...

He waves his pink pomplet.

HERR LIPP: This gives you some informations about all the activities we
have planned for you. These include 'Walking around Royston Vasey'...

He examines the pomplet, but can't find anything else of interest.

HERR LIPP: 'Walking around Royston Vasey'. There are of course many
interesting buildings in this area, and I will try and give you an entry in
all of them. Per example, if you may look to your left you will see... some
toilets...

The students see the portaloo. There are now three drowned people on
the floor. [A part of a continuous gag where people drown in the toilet

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and fall out on the street every time someone opens the door.] (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2003: 213)

The sketch taps into the clichés about the bleakness of small 'Northern' towns where there is nothing to do or see. Following the public toilet theme another small gag that is worth mentioning is from season one episode four. In the title sequence, we see a man standing on the street by the entrance of a house holding a dog leash. He says, "Come on, girl. Do your business." The camera reveals that the leash is attached to a woman who is crouched down pissing in front of someone's doorstep while the man's dog sits next to her waiting patiently. The woman replies, "Alright, I'm coming." as he pulls her very large underwear back up. This example illustrates the association of the 'North' with vulgarity.

There are also gags related to the industrial decay of the north. As Nicholson (Interview 2012) and Maconie (Maconie 2008) note, Yorkshire in terms of landscape – which is where the fictional town of Royston Vasey is supposedly located – is known for two things, countryside and farms as well as 'industrial crap'. Thus, the grimness and overall vulgarity that is attached to the geography in the collective imagination is depicted by wastelands. In his study of the geography of waste landscapes, Alan Berger establishes other names for such places (cited in Farley and Roberts 2012: 2–3). Among these 'dumpspace', 'junkspace', 'negative space' and 'off worlds' (Farley and Roberts 2012: 3–4) are the ones that seem to fit this occasion perfectly. J.B. Priestley's remarks about a northern landscape in *English Journey* is fitting too: "the ugliness is so complete it is almost exhilarating. It challenges you to live there" (cited in Maconie 2008: 136). The 'challenging' wastelands, or in other words 'dead' spaces, have been turned into 'living' areas or accepted as liveable or 'normal' by Royston Vasey's residents.

A good example that reflects this is from series two episode two. The episode starts off with a scene in industrial wasteland. The script describes the setting:

> *Scene 2:2/1 Ext. Industrial Wasteland. Day.*
>
> A desolate industrial landscape with no people or buildings in sight. We hear a tiny tune and an ice-cream van pulls up and parks. A little boy runs up to the van. (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2003: 201)

Figure 3: Wasteland Scene – Season Two Episode Two

The interesting point here is that the ice-cream van parks in an unconventional 'dead' space, marked by the decay of heavy industry, and desolation with almost no one or no buildings around. What we observe here is that the 'uncanny emptiness' is filled with some kind of social activity, and is acknowledged as a part of the texture of the town as much as a schoolyard, high street or a park.

These examples tap into the vague definitions of *The North* - its landscape, culture and identity in the popular imagination. Then the question is: How does *The League* play with cliché representations to represent a place that is authentic and specific?

The answer is that the clichés are taken to such extremes that they become something different. These stereotypical depictions can be divided to four different perspectives. The first is a southern view that describes a geography with vulgarity, a vulgarity which is embedded in a Blackpool sense of humour, reflected in Major Vaughan – who is, interestingly, played by the northern comedian Chubby Brown himself (see Maconie 2008: 41 about the sense of vulgarity). Secondly, there is a sense of eeriness, which is established by an anti-pastoral sentiment focusing on the hostility and the 'unnatural' within the countryside.

These two approaches cover the industrial or de-industrialised north as well as the rural north. The third perspective is a northern approach that translates the same acts in a different light that is both friendly and whimsical, and stands in opposition to the stereotype of cold Londoners (see Maconie 2008: 40–41). This perspective embodies the pastoral sentiment that detaches itself from the urban landscape and aligns itself with tranquillity and tradition (see Maconie 2010: 68) (see *chapter three* for the discussions about pastoralism), where the rural landscape reflects the 'authentic' England, and urban spaces are linked to moral corruption.

The League blends all these notions, that are deeply embedded in our daily lives, with something larger than life and creates something that surpasses the audience's expectations. The creators present a fully formed world that resembles what we acknowledge as a real small northern town – however we might imagine it. This is an unconventional and incomprehensible society, which – as the next chapters show in more detail – is vulgar, uncaring, inattentive, disinterested, antagonistic, monstrous yet also funny, friendly and human at the same time.

5.5 Royston Vasey as a Common Term in the Popular Imagination

As argued throughout this chapter, while creating this very specific small northern town the writers' goal was to surpass any satirical representations of the north and create something that would be able to tap into the gothic in everyday life. In that sense, the way people from small northern towns might claim Royston Vasey as a reflection of their own town marks the success of the writers. According to Pemberton, "... a lot of people like claiming Royston Vasey as their own now. A lot of people from small Northern towns [say], 'You based it [Royston Vasey] on so and so didn't you?' and they love that. Weird as it is and perverse as it is they want to claim it" (Interview 2012). This suggests that the audience can see through the exaggeration and caricatures to recognise the essence of real life in a specific geography.

In this respect the descriptions of small northern towns that can be found in Maconie's travelogues are quite useful. For example, Maconie (2008) describes the array of quirky entrepreneurial ventures on Eddleston Road in Crewe. Here, the similarity between the described high street and Royston Vasey is striking:

... a sex shop coyly offering 'marital aids', Snakes Jacks (Custom Amplification Since 1971), Picnic Basket Quality Sandwiches and Al Trophies, the sort of little shop selling tiny snooker cups and wooden shields that you often find in northern backstreets and whose continued existence is both mystifying and heartening. (2008: 41–42)

These 'real life' quirky shops mirror Royston Vasey. Maconie's description is also strikingly reminiscent of Royston Vasey:

A white-haired man in a fisherman's jersey sits gently dozing on a lawn chair in the back of his blue van clearly not selling many of his rugs and pot plants. And you will think I have made this up but behind him, visible in a single quick glance, is the richness and absurdity of English life: a man selling pigs' ears from a bucket in front of two internet cafes. (Maconie 2010: 53)

Figure 4: Flower shop selling dead flowers "Everything Must Go" – Season One Episode One

These descriptions are so familiar to the portrayal of Royston Vasey that they simultaneously illustrate the absurd, surreal, gothic, bleak and comic aspects of En-

glish culture represented in *The League*. The following example shows how the writers tap into the quirkiness of English culture and everyday life, but also surpass it by creating something "just like real life and a step beyond" (Gatiss 2011b). In Buxton, Maconie finds a Pay and Display machine that does impressions: "As your ticket emerges from its innards, you get a nasty burst of Frank Bruno ('Know what I mean, Harry') or Del Boy ('Luvvly jubbly!') (2010: 69). This reminds us of the letterbox gag in the TV series where the letterbox says: "Thank you for dropping the letter inside me" every time someone posts a letter. This gag takes the pay and display machine in Buxton to another level as later in the series we discover that there is actually a person hiding inside the letterbox who makes these announcements. This illustrates how observational comedy can be taken one step further.

These examples demonstrate the authentic depiction of the small Northern town by *The League*. Many people seem to know their own Royston Vasey (see Nicholson and Ken Cross Interviews 2012) and now all those places have a common point of reference.

5.6 Finding a Location: From imagination to reality

This section explores the reasons behind the choice of filming location and how this affected the end product. It demonstrates that what became Royston Vasey started off with writerly concerns (artistic aspirations and personal experiences), was transformed by commissioning and production practices and the interventions of other professionals.

As mentioned, because of the success of the radio show and the transition from radio to television was relatively smooth. However, this 'natural' transition was followed by a rather complicated commissioning and production processes. There seem to be two different versions of the same story, the writers' and the producers'. Scrutinising how and why these two viewpoints exist provides valuable insight into the workings of the BBC during this period, and especially the relationship between writers and producers.

Jemma Rodgers[5] explains that when *The League* moved to TV, six episodes plus one stand-alone pilot episode were commissioned (Interview 2012). Rodgers states that this was not a common commissioning practice. Pemberton points out that it was not a true pilot, because they knew they were not being judged on it since the series had already been commissioned, "but we knew that we could re-group and make some changes" (Interview 2012). Rodgers notes: "So of course we spent two thirds of the budget on the pilot and had bugger all to make the rest of it" (Interview 2012). At this point, however, the team was unaware of the financial situation.

Pemberton explains the production process from the writers' perspective. He notes that although they were ready to film the complete first season in one go, the producer Sarah Smith came up with the idea of having two separate production periods so that after making the pilot – or what Pemberton calls episode one, since the commissioning had already been approved – they could take a break, step back, examine the material and make the necessary adjustments. According to Pemberton:

> ... it was a very clever decision to make episode one separate because we could look at it and go, 'Wow! That looks amazing. That works really well. This doesn't work so well'. And so when we went back to record the first of the series we knew what we were doing. So, it was very very well put together by Sarah Smith, I have to say. (Interview 2012)

Rodgers provides a different view of the events. According to her after the TV series was commissioned "there was a bit of a hiatus" (Interview 2012):

> ... basically what happened is that [there] just wasn't enough money to make it [...] They offered us – I can't remember what it was – it was I mean actually in today's standards [it] wasn't that low but at the time it was ridiculously low. And Sarah felt very strongly that we couldn't make it for that money. Even though, I was the associate producer, so I was kind of saying, 'We'll find a way. We'll find a way'. (Interview 2012)

The producer and the associate producer took a major decision not to divulge any of these concerns to the writers. During our interview in 2012 Pemberton was still unaware of this situation. While the writers thought having two separate production processes was a helpful exercise, the real reason was purely economic. As the writers

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[5]Rodgers was the associate producer of the first series.

worked on adjustments, during the 'break' the producers were looking to solve the budget shortfall. According to Rodgers, Smith was pessimistic about the future of the project:

> So Sarah and I [were] kind of stressing about how we will actually find the money to make it and whether in fact it was even a good idea to take the commission given how far off the money was. And I sort of suggested to Sarah that I'll keep them [the writers] occupied. Me and the boys got in a mini bus and we drove up to Yorkshire and we did our first mini recce. (Interview 2012)

This was the beginning of the search for Royston Vasey. The writers and Rodgers already had places in mind that could serve as the perfect filming location. These places were all located within Yorkshire since all the writers, as well as the associate producer were all from Yorkshire. Gatiss explains, "We all had an idea about the sort of place we [had] grown up in or known as children. We just had a big shortlist really. [...] We drove around trying to outdo each other as to what was the most shitty place" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005c). He adds, "And it became a sort of battle like, 'I know somewhere much worse than that.' and we were driving around various places to try to find somewhere we remembered" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005b).

Apart from the writers' artistic concerns the second important element that shaped their search was economic. Rodgers' deal with Yorkshire Television for the studio filming played a significant role in their search for a location. Rodgers claims she made a deal with Yorkshire Television to film the series at their premises, because it was cheaper than filming in the BBC's own studios: "Brian Abrams was the studio manager at Yorkshire Television and honest to God the thing wouldn't have existed without him. He gave these incredible deals" (Interview 2012).[6] This deal was possible because of 'Producer Choice', which allowed producers to choose outside facilities. Rodgers explains how this influenced the recce:

> So we went to Todmorden. We went to Haworth. We went to Damems. Although what I already decided by then was in order to do the studio as cheap as possible we were going to do them at Yorkshire Television in Leeds. And they'd already done us an astounding deal to build the sets.

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[6]See *chapter eight* for further discussions on YTV.

At that time it had the audiences as well. So we had to find a location preferably in a sort of 50 mile radius of Leeds. So it had to be sort of radiate from there [...] We kind of contained ourselves to around West Yorkshire ... (Interview 2012)

There were artistic, technical and budgetary factors the writers and producer were looking for, that were necessary for the visual look of the show. Gatiss explains, "We needed somewhere with a good high street with lots of shops, for obvious reasons, and lots of different possible locations for things" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005b). Secondly, Dyson notes that they were looking for certain geographical and architectural elements (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005b). Rodgers noted that another key concern was to make sure that no one had ever filmed in that location before. On the other hand, the economic consideration was to find a location that satisfied all the technical requirements, so that they could film everything in one place rather than having to film in separate locations. Rodgers summarises the recce:

> ... the first place we looked at was Todmorden. And everyone really liked the bridge in the middle but it didn't really have the hills. We were all very convinced that it had to have hills around it so it felt isolated. Not a village but somewhere that could be a little town and [we were] really passionate about the fact that nobody else should have ever filmed there. [...] Then we went to Keighley and I remember we liked where the pylons were and it was opposite a curry house and that was all quite good. Haworth was great for the hills but we were sort of thinking at that time that maybe we'll take like little bits of different towns and create a town, which you normally do. From a budgetary perspective I was desperately hoping it would all be in one place so we didn't have to move the unit... That recce was kind of nice... It just got them out of the house basically. They were looking around. Although ironically in Haworth Sarah called me and said we are pulling it, we can't make it for the money. And I was just like, 'No! We can! We absolutely can' Because I've already done the deal with Yorkshire Television and all the rest of it. So we carried on trying to find the money. (Interview 2012)

Since they could not get a result from this recce location scouting was the next stage for the search. Rodgers describes the events:

> Then after that recce I got two location managers on board and they started scouting basically from the bottom of the Peak District all the way around both the east and west side. Because I've gone to RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects), the architecture library, and looked at where buildings sat, how much concave, you know how big the hills will be. So I had a quite specific knowledge of where we might find the perfect hills with a nestling village in them. So I sent these two location managers out to find them and everything was just too flat, or too sprawled [...] it was literally about two weeks before we were due to film and we were thinking, 'Oh God! We are just gonna have to take one of them and make it work'. (Interview 2012)

It is interesting that the town Hadfield was found by chance, after the recce and the location scouting failed to deliver a solution. Rodgers described how she found the filming location:

> And I was literally driving down to Manchester and I was coming along the Glossop pass, the snake pass M57 and I saw this sign said, 'Hadfield, Padfield' and I just thought, 'That's funny. Hadfield, Padfield'. Just distracted me for that. And I literarily took a right draw up this road, snaked up and ended up by the war monument. And I got out of my car and I was just like, 'Holly Fuck! This is it!' (Laughs) This snake road down, the hut, this morsel all there [...] It was just incredible. Had a station, it was literally was called 'the last stop'. The butcher was there. Half the shops were boarded up. It was just unbelievable. [...] I took loads of photos of it and rang Grenville[7] straight away and said, 'Grenville, I think I found it. I think I found it!' (Interview 2012)

This illustrates that for the visualisation of the fictional Northern town the economic conditions, the production deal with Yorkshire Television Studios, the associate producer's input, working relationships within the production team, the technical requirements and the writers' artistic concerns were all influential elements.

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[7]Grenville Horner was the production designer.

5.7 Filming up North: Yorkshire Television Studios

This section explores how the studio location influenced the production. Through an exploration of the decision behind the choice of Yorkshire Studios, it examines the influence of organisational and industrial conditions. The issues that lie at the heart of the analysis are the significance of individuals and the ways in which being away from London affected creative atmosphere and autonomy. Building on *chapter four*, the accounts highlight how the professionals worked within the new system 'Producer Choice' to achieve their creative goals.

The League was an in house production, financed by the BBC and filmed in an ITV studio. This was not a common practice (Plowman Interview 2012). When asked in what way the show became a BBC production? Plowman replies, "Well it became a BBC production because the BBC people worked on it and made it for the BBC" (Interview 2012). Plowman's answer is interesting as is does not mention the studio location. It is of course significant that *The League* falls into a time period when the 25% independent production quota was being introduced at the BBC, as well as 'Producer Choice', which encouraged productions outside the BBC. Yet, again it is important to note that *The League*'s case stands out from the rest. It was not an independent production created for the BBC. *The League* was an in-house production financed by the BBC, created by BBC staff but filmed in the premises of an independent studio.

As discussed in *chapter four*, 'Producer Choice', new managerialism, and the Peacock report's 25% independent quota recommendation were imposed for economic reasons. These new measures, for Born (2004), were ruining the fabric of the institution, its ethos, the working relationships between employees, limiting creative freedom as well as reducing the quality of programmes and working conditions. However, examining *The League*'s case, we see that Rodgers and Plowman, two creative managers, found ways to utilise these new conditions for the benefit of their programmes and their creative teams.

Examining the events that revolved around the deal with Yorkshire Studios provides valuable insight into production conditions and practices at the time and how

they were influenced by the wider context. This particular example helps shed light on programme making in the Corporation during this time period.

As Rodgers previously noted the money that was offered was not enough for an ambitious project like *The League*. The show aimed for high production values. Under 'Producer Choice', a system designed for cutting 'inefficiencies' such as long studio sessions and expensive filming devices, the show was expected to lower its costs. One way of doing this would have been to compromise the vision. However, Rodgers conceived an alternative approach. With 'Producer Choice' the production team now had the option of finding an alternative cheaper studio location than the BBC's own studios (Rodgers Interview 2012). Filming on ITV company premises was given a green light because it reduced production costs.

The associate producer used 'Producer Choice' to meet production goals in the face of economic pressures. Rodgers explains how these steps were influential in creative terms, helping to develop a creative atmosphere as well as bonding a closer team (Interview 2012). Rodgers recalls Paul Jackson and Jon Plowman visiting Yorkshire Studios during the filming of the end of second season where Mrs Briss, the wife of the infamous butcher of Royston Vasey Hillary Briss, is revealed to be literally a cow:

> They came to visit us and we just built this haystack bed and we were manoeuvring Mrs Briss [an actual live cow] in and literally Paul Jackson was going, 'What on earth is going on?' and I am going, 'It's Mrs Briss. She's come home'. But you would never be able to do that again. The BBC would have been really pokey about it, whereas in Yorkshire Television we just opened the doors and in came Mrs Briss. We shot the scene and off she went again, you know. It was lovely working there. And actually I think, I found this with other shows, it sort of helps to be away from London. We were kind of in this weird Leaguesqe world. We were on our own. The whole crew and the production team went from filming [on location] to the studio because we all stayed in hotels together we were a very close team. So by then we were all kind of living in each other's pockets anyway. And I think that really helped it, helped protect, I mean not that you'd have that because four boys themselves were so secure in what they are writing but it helped it. It helps the creativity of it.

> Because we were just able to kind of be in our own world and not worry
> about any nonsense really. (Interview 2012)

Rodgers' remarks underline the creative freedom that they gained by being away from London. By being outside London, the team managed to stay away from some of the more limiting provisions of 'Producer Choice', such as tighter managerial control and limitation on creative experimentation to minimise economic inefficiencies. There are two ways to interpret these accounts. Either being away together as a team, helped to foster relationships and focus within the team. Or, being at Yorkshire Television allowed them to do whatever they liked. Or, most likely, a combination of the two.

5.8   Conclusion

As one of the key textual devices, location is essential for understanding the incarnations of *The League of Gentlemen*. This analysis demonstrates how on-screen representations – northern geography and cultural identity – were influenced by off-screen elements and stages such as the organisational system 'Producer Choice', organisational strategies, channel strategies and tone, the BBC's long running production traditions (comedy output transfer from radio to television), working relationships (e.g. the producers and the writers), production atmosphere (being away from London together as a team), individual input, creative autonomy, the writers' backgrounds and inspirations. This extensive exploration, that followed production from the birth of the idea of the town to how it reached its on-screen physical incarnation, acknowledges the precariousness of programme making and exposes the 'hidden labour of production' (Scannell 2007: 4). Building on the arguments in *chapter four*, it demonstrates the significance of micro-level analysis for understanding media, especially comedy, production. It also underlines how programme making is constituted by numerous, complicated elements such as economic and artistic concerns, ethos, serendipity and organisational conditions.

The 'behind the scenes' exploration of location focused on various stages of *On the Town with the League of Gentlemen* and *The League of Gentlemen* such as commissioning, scheduling and production. Their examination points to the significance

of the BBC as a media organisation and acknowledges channel tone (especially in the context of Radio 4 and BBC 2), ethos and structure as highly influential factors in the creation process. The examples and issues that were discussed shed light on the producer, the associate producer and the writers' roles; as well as their working relationships. The topics that were examined, such as setting sketches in one place, naming the towns and finding a filming location, not only reflect the precariousness of programme making but also highlight the significance of the human factor. Consequently, the analysis a) offers insight into the creation processes of the League texts (*research question one*), b) developed our understanding of the production ecology of the BBC (*research question two*) and c) found that micro and meso level elements are crucial for explaining how 'special moments' in TV develop (*research question three*).

The analysis revealed that the producers, who mediated between the creative and the administrative requirements, found a balance to satisfy both. The examination of budget cuts, the requirements of 'Producer Choice', being away from London and filming at YTV studios illustrated that a) not all organisational and economic restrictions are destructive, and b) individuals can manipulate the organisational and industrial structures to achieve their creative goals.

This exploration also reveals *The League*'s status as a social text yet shows that it is not a social commentary about people and places. Here, authenticity in a northern context is essential. Although, for instance, Monty Python, English Gothic literature, traditional English absurd and surreal comedy, and pantomime tradition were influential for the writers, they do not wish their work to be seen as surreal. They do, however, make use of grotesque, excess, absurdity and caricature, yet these elements are deeply rooted in 'real' life. For instance, Maconie's accounts of small English towns that embody "the richness and absurdity of English life" (2010: 53) authenticate the origins of *The League*. The writers observe and reflect on the gothic, horror, tragedy and comedy in everyday life and also employ these genres' conventions in their works. As discussed in *chapter three*, the emotions and idioms created in these genres are deeply embedded in the English psyche and form the basis of everyday context. By combining all these elements *The League* offers something "just like real life and a step beyond" (Gatiss 2011b). It offers a fully formed world with its own

rules. Although the show portrays a grim northern town, it is certainly not ordinary nor a cliché.

It can be suggested that the writers' aspiration for representing a 'specific' place without commenting on it is enhanced by cliché notions and vagueness, too. While at first they might sound like contradictory approaches, examined closely, clichés do not appear to be there for the sake of satire, or to encode simple comments, but to offer complex structures and meanings, thus supporting the writers' aspirations.

The next chapter examines commissioning and production practices, focusing on the BBC's organisational structure, executive decisions and higher occupational roles (e.g. channel controller and commissioner) as well as these professionals' individual approaches. It also demonstrate the significance of individual input, backgrounds, aspirations and roles of other professionals such as the director, costume designer, production designer and the director of photography, as well as the writers, the producers and the executive producer.

CHARACTER IN THE LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN

Chapter six focuses on the significance of the characters for *The League*'s incarnations, exploring their implications on other textual elements, how the characters developed and which factors were influential in this process (*research question one and two*). It draws attention to some macro aspects such as channel tone, organisational signature and tradition as well as some micro elements such as the writers', executive producer's and costume designer's individual styles. While the analysis of the development of the characters contributes to answering *research question one and two*, the discussions around originality, collaboration and individual input contributes to answering *research question three*.

6.1 points out that *The League* is a character driven show: its characters reflect the nature of the show and make it original. Here, the concept of 'character commitment' is key to our understanding, which can be summarised as:

- Creating completely developed characters and making them specific rather than generic;

- Creating complex characters that are unpredictable and embody monstrosity as well as vulnerability;

- Fully embodying the characters during performances;

- Presenting them without criticising their behaviours and attitudes.

This idea connects to the discussions on location and the nature of the show (in *chapter five*), which focused on the writers' aims for representing something specific and as-it-is, without making a parody of it. *Chapter five* also drew out the theme 'just like real life and a step beyond' (Gatiss 2011b), that reflects what *The League* is and why it is original. Here section *6.1* explores how this theme translates in terms of character. It scrutinises the characters' roots in 'real' life and how the writers man-

aged to turn their personal experiences into a shared public experience. By focusing on the concepts of ambiguity, unpredictability and absurdity (see *chapter three*) it explores how the characters rooted in 'real' life are taken 'a step beyond'. The key points here are specificity, familiarity, extraordinariness, complexity, and detail in character. Tracing the development of the characters from stage to television this section also points to the significance of the stage performances in this process. It maps the ways in which character development and commitment developed through the need for rapid costume change between sketches, wearing tuxedos as uniforms, and booking venues regularly for long periods.

Emphasising the collaborative nature of production, 6.2 illustrates how the costume designer Yves Barre was able to contribute to the visual development of the characters, as well as the visual and ideological framework of the show. It explores the way Barre was able to tap into the writers' vision for the characters and develop it through his input. Here discussions revolve around the importance of character silhouettes and how the designer developed unique paddings to create a specific physical look for each character, the designer's influence over the look of the main and supporting characters, the concept of 'intensifying ugliness' that developed during the design process, and themes of drag and attention to detail in the designer's work.

6.1 Significance of the Characters

This section examines the significance of the characters for *The League* phenomenon. It illustrates some of the important factors in its creation process: writers' vision, channel tone and comedy tradition as well as the executive producer's approach.

The League's – especially its television incarnation – reliance on characters lies at the heart of the show. This is also one of the major points that makes the show original. The three performer/writers between them play all the main parts (both male and female), each playing approximately twenty characters in one season. As this chapter will demonstrate, particularly in the TV show, a prime aim during the creation process was to be able to fully develop each character and make them distinct in terms of: their look, their sound and individual character traits. The writers also

aimed to fully embody each character without commenting on it[1] — both in the writing and performance. These points coincide with a key theme discussed in the previous chapter, which emphasised the writers' eagerness to reflect a specific place without making a parody of it (e.g. trying to avoid the 'it's grim up North' cliché). In the case of characters this meant representing *specific* characters without passing judgement on them. Although these characters might appear like parodies at first sight, they become more complex as the series develop.[2] This signifies a part of *The League*'s comedy style – e.g. staying away from parody and satire (see *chapter five*).

Chapter five pointed out that, particularly at the beginning of the writers' journey as the League of Gentlemen, the characters formed the core of the series while the other textual elements such as format, narrative and location were adapted to accommodate these characters that were the main focus (see Pemberton Interview 2012). This approach stemmed from the writers' backgrounds as trained actors. Pemberton explains, "None of us were interested in doing stand up, we weren't interested in doing improvisational comedy, we were interested in the craft of writing and acting" (Interview 2012). This ambition led them to create sketches that were based on characters rather than an idea. Pemberton explains:

> ... sometimes sketches are based on an idea and the characters are lightly sketched in. We did a few of those but we were more interested in characters which could return and characters which people could grow to like or hate... (Interview 2012)

The writers' artistic vision also coincides with the channel tone of Radio 4 and BBC 2, and the comedy tradition within these channels. Lumsden (former BBC Controller of Comedy Commissioning) describes the BBC's in-house style as "... kind of word play, characters, they are quite smart, clever or extra-ordinary or bizarre or obtuse, and that's very much the BBC in-house's stamp" (Interview 2011). According to Lumsden, this in-house style was what Radio 4 and BBC 2 invested in when *The League*'s radio and television incarnations were broadcast (Interview 2011). Hence, Lumsden describes *The League* as a "typical in-house comedy show" (Interview 2011) that is structured around extra-ordinary characters, offering a deeper level of engagement (see Murphy Interview 2011, and Plowman Interview 2012).

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[1]The executive producer, Jon Plowman came up with this phrase, see Plowman Interview, 2012.
[2]This is further explored in *chapter seven* on narrative.

Lumsden adds "... everything they [Radio 4 and BBC 2] had invested in was very sort of wordsmith, very super smart, dominated by a Jon Plowman sort of taste" (Interview 2011). Jon Plowman, *The League*'s executive producer, became the BBC's head of comedy entertainment in 1994 and consequently head of comedy in 2004 after a reorganisation of departments (BBC 2007). Whilst staying as the producer in his hit shows such as *French and Saunders* (BBC, 1987–2007), he also worked as an executive on a succession of well-known shows including *The Office*, *Little Britain* and *The Thick Of It*. Along with the influence of channel tone on commissioning, Lumsden's comments signify Plowman's influence on a generation of shows while pointing out the influence the executive producer had on *The League*.

Plowman outlines what he thinks is original about the League, "... what struck me about them [was] the sort of commitment to character" (Interview 2011). Plowman clarifies what he means by 'character commitment' by comparing the League to French and Saunders[3], another popular comedy team Plowman worked with:

> If you look at how those two [Plowman points at a poster of French and Saunders] for example, do character... I'm not saying they do it without commitment but... There is a sort of twinkle; there is a sort of stand slightly to one side of the character and comment on it. So you know that when Dawn [Dawn French] is playing a character that she is also being Dawn. Does that make sense? Whereas when Mark [Mark Gatiss] is playing a character I think he is not being Mark. (Interview 2012)

For Plowman, when Gatiss, Pemberton and Shearsmith play characters they 'disappear' in them. For example, Plowman mentions Mrs Denton, one of the characters Gatiss plays, and suggests:

> You believe that she is a woman, not just because there is a brilliant ... nude suit as it were being used but he believes, I think, and you believe that that's a woman. (Interview 2012)

An important point here is that the actor does not just play any woman but a very specific character. They are not trying to say that this is how every woman living in a small town in the north of England behaves and looks like, but this is what this particular female character is like. Plowman adds:

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[3]*French and Saunders* was formed by Dawn French and Jennifer Saunders.

I remember when we first did it, one of the lines that I kept trying to push, to get the press office to push was the idea [...] 'Look there are only three people on screen and they play all the parts!' That was what was extraordinary... that they disappeared. They never stood to one side of things. They entirely absorbed those characters. In a way that is unusual. It's a commitment... (Interview 2012)

The idea of 'character commitment' and *The League*'s originality in relation to character is further explored in the next four sub-sections. The main theme observed in *chapter five* in terms of location and also in *The League*'s comedy style, 'just like real life and a step beyond' (Gatiss 2011b), manifests in their characters in that they are all based on real people and real life experiences, yet they are taken one step further through the inspiration and vision of the writers and other creative contributors, especially in terms of creating their visual appearance. While there are fragments of everyday life in the characters that one can recognise, these characters also surpass clichés by being complex, unpredictable, distinct and fully constructed.

6.1.1 *Characters Rooted in Real People: 'Just like real life...'*

This section focuses on the first part of the theme "just like real life and a step beyond" (Gatiss 2011b) and explores how it translates into *The League*'s characters, by illustrating the significance of the writers' backgrounds to character development.

Even though the location 'a northern town' did not develop until the radio series, right from the beginning the League created northern voices. Pemberton explains that this is very much linked to their backgrounds as well as their artistic ambitions of trying to create something 'authentic' and 'specific':

> ... every writer draws on their experiences and the voice that you write with. Of course you try to create different characters but there are rhythms, there are cadences. I mean Reece [Shearsmith] and I still do it now. Every time we are writing characters we go, 'Oh! God! They are northern. Why are they always northern?' And it's because you have that in your head. [...] We were inspired by hearing the Alan Bennetts and Victoria Woods and watching that as a child having going, 'Yes! That is how

people speak'. It wasn't generic. It was specific. And so [...] the characters had that because you want to make them specific. You want to base it on a specific person you remember growing up or a specific person you met. And then once we decided that geographically the characters were linked of course it made sense. You weren't going to show off your range of accents because they all lived in the same place. (Interview 2012)

In a 'Behind the Scenes' documentary of series two the writers collectively explain how they create their characters. Pemberton suggests, "I would say you know 75–80% of the characters do have bases in real people" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005b). Shearsmith notes, "Generally it's just the things we've heard and seen. And sometimes literally hearing conversations" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005b). Gatiss continues, "Little things people say particularly. Little lines that you can find a way of sandwiching in somewhere" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005b). Dyson adds, "One thing that somebody has done will maybe spark of a character but you don't take people and put them on screen" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005b). Dyson lists some of these real life inspirations:

> Tubbs and Edward were inspired by a real visit to a nick-nack shop in Rottingdean where a genteel shopkeeper cowered in terror as we browsed her sea-shells and snow-storms. Papa Lazarou's name and bizarre patois were culled from Steve and Reece's landlord, Mr Papalazarou. The Dentons' fastidiousness and house rules were inspired by a difficult stay I had with relatives. (2000: 2–3)

The fact that many characters have their counterparts in reality reflects *The League*'s observational style, which opposes the views that define their comedy style as solely 'surreal' (see *chapter five*). This observational comedy is not only linked to the people the writers have known or met, but also developed out of moments of inspiration which Dyson defines as "what we found in the world" (2000: 2). Dyson notes, "Gradually these things were added to the soup with observation made directly from life" (2000: 2). These included a collection of lost passport photographs, and video recordings of some TV moments such as news reports, and documentaries such as *A Change of Sex* (BBC, 1979) that follows the sexual transformation of a transsexual (see Dyson 2000; Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005j; Dyson, Gatiss et al.

2007). These where a select group of sources the writers went through over and over again to scour for comic gems (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2007). For example, Pemberton explains that *A Change of Sex,* which depicts an awkward session between a transsexual patient and a hugely unsympathetic doctor, was so inspirational he ended up copying out whole tranches of the conversations for Dr. Carlton sketches, and also injected some elements from it to the character Barbara, the transsexual cab driver who, almost every time she appears, provides graphic descriptions of her sex change operation (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2007: 124).

6.1.2 *A Private Joke Made Public*

Observational comedy brings out another element, which has not been discussed previously: making a private joke public. Here, the character Papa Lazarou (performed by Shearsmith) provides a useful example.

Figure 1: Papa Lazarou – Season two episode one

Papa Lazarou enters the series in season two with his circus. This character is a demonic circus master and 'wife collector' who claims women (and later in series

three also men) by scaring and confusing them with a made up language until they hand over their wedding rings to him. Some of the signature phrases of the character are 'Hello Dave!' as he tends to call all his 'wives' – both men and women – Dave, 'You are my wife now' and 'This is just a saga now.' Pemberton offers an example of how they develop characters:

> ... we sit down, 'So what is the funny thing about this character?' but that creates a very two dimensional or even one dimensional character and at that point you add different pieces of other people. Like Papa Lazarou. We had a landlord called Mr Papalazarou and he used to ring up and say, – because I used to deal with him when we moved in – 'Steve!' and Reece would say, 'No, no. It's Reece here. Steve is not in.' 'OK. Is Steve there?' 'No, no, no. Steve will be back soon but I can speak to you.' 'OK. I want to speak to Steve.' And he would never speak to Reece. He would never communicate with him and we just found this so funny. And he kept saying, 'Oh it's a saga now!' So we've taken all these lines from our landlord, which no one else would find funny and somehow it works as a character. (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005b)

The writers' comedy style is influenced by their close friendships (see *chapter 4.3*) and the writing process they choose to work with. Four writers tend to work in pairs where generally Shearsmith and Pemberton, and Dyson and Gatiss partner up. After the pairs come up with a draft, they share it with the other group and mould it together. The writers explain that four of them working together slows down the writing process and the grouping happened naturally. For example, Pemberton and Shearsmith used to live together after college and wrote sketches together. On the writing process Pemberton notes:

> Reece and I just sit there and we make each other laugh. ... some weird things which you can't image anyone would ever find funny, which we find funny between us have just translated really well. (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005b)

On this issue Dyson (2007) explores John Miller's argument about the nature of comedy. According to Miller nothing makes one laugh as hard as a private joke. Therefore, for him, the funniest comedy can be described as "the things that lodges

under people's skins and that they take to their heart" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2007: 81), which tend to carry the quality of a private joke made public. Dyson explains how this relates to *The League*:

> I have a vivid recollection of watching Reece performing Papa Lazarou for the first time in his and Steve's shared front room, and I thought to myself that it was just too personal and a private thing – something Reece has designed to make Steve laugh, a joke about their landlord – and that it would prove impenetrable to any audience. How telling that Papa Lazarou went on to become one of our most popular characters. (cited in Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2007: 81–82)

6.1.3 *Unpredictability, Absurdity & Uncertainty: Pushing the characters 'one step beyond'*

This section focuses on the idea of taking 'real life' a *step beyond* in terms of developing the characters. It discusses how representing 'marginalised people' on the screen relates to two key elements of programme making: authenticity – showing a 'slice of life' – and creating something unique. It illustrates that through its characters the show was able to fulfil these important aspects of comedy production, especially for BBC 2.

Some of the original aspects of *The League* are: a) presenting a section of British society that is rarely seen on TV, b) representing with a sense of authenticity and c) going beyond 'reality' and creating a world of its own. While the audience can interpret the show partly through the 'true to life' representations of a small northern town and its inhabitants, *The League* also creates an unfamiliar world with unfamiliar characters by drawing on unpredictability and uncertainty (see *chapter five*). These two concepts – as discussed in *chapter three* – carry the essence of gothic, horror, absurdity, grotesque and comedy.

The term 'underbelly of TV representations' (Murphy Interview 2011) is an interesting aspect that coincides with British social realism that was discussed in *chapter three*. In this sense *The League* offers images that do not usually dominate British television screens and characters unfamiliar to audiences. The town of Royston Vasey, and its inhabitants, chime perfectly with the theme 'marginalised places and

marginalised people' that is key to this specific strand of British film and television (see *chapter three* and *chapter five*). An important point here is that *The League* is not a 'social realist' text, as the writers did not aim to put a small town in the north of England and its inhabitants on the screens because they felt they were underrepresented. Most importantly they did not try to 'comment' on any situation, people or place.

To understand the 'underbelly of TV representations', channel tone, tradition, individual taste and viewership are significant factors, too. As discussed in *6.1*, BBC 2 as a channel, and Plowman (the executive producer) as a TV professional look for unique programmes. Focusing on BBC 2's long running comedy tradition Lumsden explains "... that type of very odd, surreal, black comedy is very very important to have ... on a channel that's got its legacy all about that mix of tone" (Interview 2011). Reflecting on channel viewership, programme commissioning and programme making Murphy (former BBC Choice and BBC 3 Channel Controller) notes that BBC 2 can invest on "smarter" and "dense" shows because, presumably, it attracts audiences who have "more historical knowledge, intellectual gravitas" than more mainstream channels (Interview 2011). Therefore *The League*'s complex characters are a good fit for BBC 2.

Another significant point here is the way these people and places are represented on television. Murphy's argument on audience expectation is very useful in understanding key concepts of TV commissioning and programme making and how they relate to character:

> I think the sweet spot for TV ... is to try and make something on TV that when viewers watch ...[it seems like] a world that ... exists...You know, you imagine that exists somewhere and we see a slice of it. (Interview 2011)

Murphy's remark points to two aspects: authenticity and creating detailed fictional worlds. Authenticity is about making the audience feel as if the characters and the location of a show exist. The writers' inspirations from real people and real places fulfil this notion.

The second point is the idea of a fully-formed world. Although, *The League* offers a world very different than reality, a place filled with characters that follow different

rules – such as Tubbs, one of the owners of the local shop, who breast feeds a pig, eats onions as if she is eating apples, uses her urine as fuel and with her husband murders 'strangers' who come to visit their town – the audience feels like this place exists somewhere because this world and its inhabitants appear so fully-formed. Murphy describes such shows as "fully constructed but it's a world that has odd rules" (Interview 2011). This is linked to Pemberton's previous remarks on avoiding 'line-drawn' characters and the writers' passion for detail. Rodger's (*The League*'s producer) observations illuminate the depth of detail the writers put into the show:

> I've been astonished since coming over into drama that a lot of drama writers do not put anything like the level of detail in, let's say, as *The League* would. [...] And again that's why it worked because they just knew those characters inside out and it, I think, enabled them to go to places that people couldn't go to. Because they were so in the characters. Papa Lazarou who is my absolute favorite. What is that? You know, what is it? It's unbelievable and yet when Reece is in it, it is Papa Lazarou. There is no question. (Interview 2012)

The costume designer Yves Barre (Interview 2012) describes Royston Vasey as an island in itself and sees the 'Royston Vasonians' as a tribe in an enclosed world. Although, on paper, things that the characters do may not make sense, when we see the comedy play out it makes complete sense (See Murphy Interview 2011). These remarks help us understand the way *The League* utilised uncertainty, absurdity, and unpredictability. Although the characters may act in an unexpected fashion with their roots in 'real people' and created in a fully constructed fashion we do not particularly question why a character is acting or dressed in an 'absurd' fashion. These characters are fully constructed and are part of a fully constructed world. The next sub-section explores the development of these characters and the League's comedy style.

6.1.4 *Character Development: From stage to television*

The foundations of *The League* characters lie in their stage background. These characters were born during stage performances – their character traits, background sto-

ries, physical looks and voices. As the performers used minimal props on stage the visual look was very stripped-down directing the main focus to the performance (See Barre Interview 2012). The following radio show can also be seen as a platform to improve and concentrate on the characters' voices. The television series, however, is where the visual look was fully formed through the contributions of the costume designer Yves Barre and the make-up artists. This section points out the significance of the stage performances on the development of the characters: physical looks, character traits and voices. It explores the link between limited costume change time between sketches, wearing tuxedos as uniforms and booking venues regularly for long periods, and character development and commitment.

This is It!, the first live show that the writers put together, which ran from Christmas 1994 into New Year 1995, forms the foundations of what we came to know as *The League,* especially in terms of character.[4] Pemberton explains:

> It wasn't called *The League of Gentlemen* [...] but this was the first time we did a show to the public and that show featured Pauline, it featured Geoff, it featured Bernice. A number of characters that had seen us all the way through started in this very very first show. And we did it for four nights. We loved doing it. And at the end of it, it became clear that we had something. (Interview 2012)

Pemberton notes that the writers, "... spent 1995 sort of thinking 'We should do more of this' But not quite knowing what to do about it" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i). First they did one-off shows (gigs on a bill) where they did ten-minute performances between stand-up shows. Shearsmith explains, "We just didn't feel that this was right for us. So we just went ahead and booked our regular slot at the Canal Cafe Theatre in West London" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i). Shearsmith states that for them booking a long-term period, in this case four months, was the only way to keep on creating new material (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i). After the first Canal Café runs, the group headed off to the 1996 Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Pemberton explains their next move:

> So we went to Edinburgh in 1996 and after we came back in September we decided to kill off all those characters, not literally but forget them,

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[4]See 4.3 for a breakdown of the League's background.

they work. And we came up with a whole new set and that was when the Dentons came in, Herr Lipp and people like that. And then again we said, 'OK those characters work'. And then we came up with stuff like Papa Lazarou and Les McQueen and Pop. [...] unless you kind off wipe the slate clean of your characters you're always going to be tempted to do your old favourites and that's how we were able to create so many I think. (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i)

This proactive attitude, booking regular long-term slots and creating new characters for each new period was key to developing new characters. Dyson notes that for every week's performance they tried to present about 25 per cent new material, which meant that this had to be written and rehearsed in one week (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i). The writers also used a similar approach after their radio series before they went onto television. In 1998 they did a Gatehouse Theatre run to try out new characters for the television series (Pemberton Interview 2012).

Pemberton notes that during these performances the group created their own 'brand', "so we had a name, we had image, we had a style" (Interview 2012). Gatiss explains that what they were going for was to create "an old fashioned review image" with the tuxedos and embody a completely different comedy style (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i). In the stage performances there were only three actors on stage dressed in tuxedos using very few probs. Pemberton explains, "We performed even from the very beginning in tuxedos. And we thought it's always good to have a uniform, which you can project the characters on to, for it all to look uniform..." (Interview 2012). Pemberton adds:

> ... for example Tubbs, I did have a headscarf and I had Sellotape. And [for Edward] Reece had Sellotape and a cap. So Pauline was a pair of glasses and a clipboard. [...] Because you were coming off and on again. ... there were only three of us doing it so things you can literally take off and pick up and be ready to do the next sketch. And it seemed to work. It really focuses in on the voices and the characters and our costume designer Yves Barre would later call 'silhouettes of characters'. ... how do you stand, the shape that you make with your body was really important because you had to differentiate between the characters very quickly. [...] Having

very little access to costume was a great way of embodying characters. (Interview 2012)
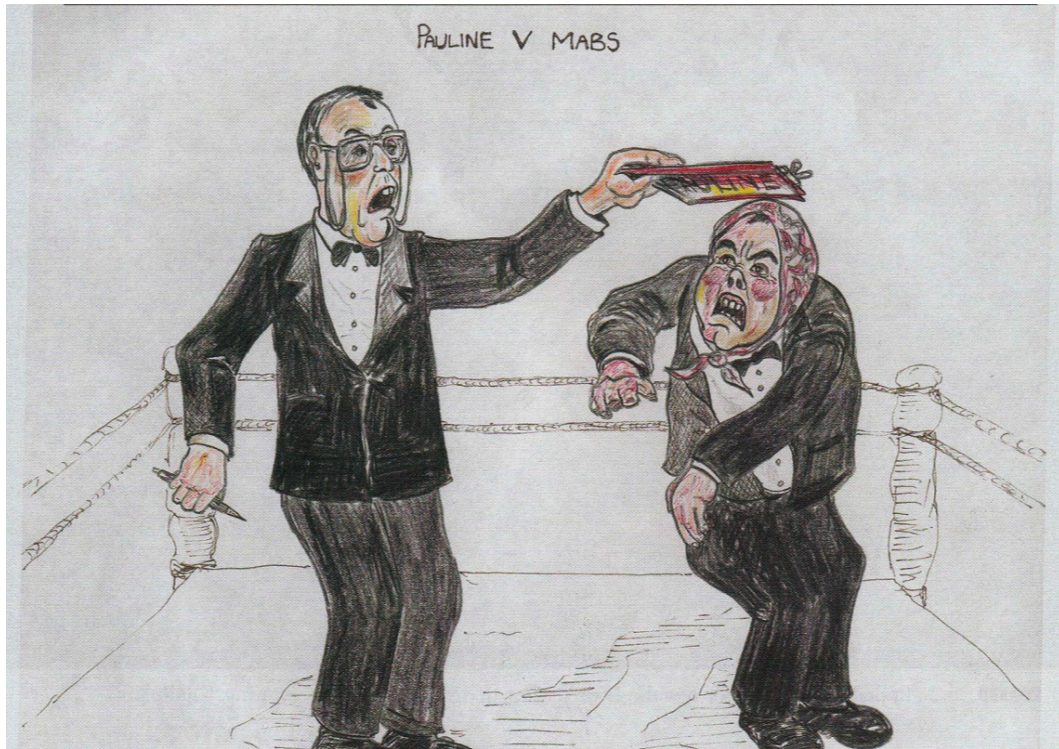
Figure 2: Pauline and Tubbs on stage: a drawing by the writers (*The League of Gentlemen Scripts and That* : 42)

These remarks link us to the concept of 'character commitment'. In a fast paced show where three actors play all the roles between them, they wore tuxedos as a uniform and only used a minimum amount of props, which helped them focus on their performances and develop a distinct physical look and sound for each character.

Barre (Interview 2012) describes 'silhouette of a character' as the outline of a character, how one stands and walks. For Barre (Interview 2012), this is a key factor that the audience subconsciously perceives and uses to understand a character. Barre points out some of the tricks that the performers used to define character silhouettes on stage. For example, Shearsmith would make himself look fatter by sinking his neck into a collar while playing Geoff, a trick that Barre took a step further for this character's television and cinema incarnations (Barre Interview 2012). Barre (Interview 2012) explains that to create a fat character he would build a stand up collar

using solid foam for the paddings and when an actor sunk his neck in this structure his neck would look wider making him look larger.

6.2 Costume Design Process & Character Development

This section focuses on the costume design process and its influence on character development. It scrutinises the costume designer's contribution to the characters: how he managed to tap into the writers' 'wavelength,' to help realise their on-screen vision, to developed it through his own input, and helped reinforce character commitment. *6.2* develops the discussion on character silhouettes that was introduced in *6.1.4* highlighting the importance of this aspect for *The League*. It illustrates how the costume designer interpreted characters initially designed for the stage, for the small screen, helped create a distinct visual look for each character, and reinforced the sense of character by developing unique paddings and physical silhouettes. The analysis of the costume design process adds context to *chapter four's* discussions on collaboration and individual input in television production.

 6.2 also touches on the issue of drag and designates what differentiates the League from other male performers playing women. The discussions relate back to the concept of character commitment and illustrate Barre's ability to tap into the writer/performers' mind-sets to understand their aims – making unique characters, with attention to detail and everyday life, whilst incorporating themes of grotesqueness and unpredictability. The analysis suggests that the show's intention was not to reflect 'real northern women' but to create very specific characters. Although the writers, the producer and the costume designer accept that there is a sense of grotesque which comes from the fact that these are men playing women they argue that their aim was not to create caricatured female characters. The discussions highlight that the sense of grotesqueness at the heart of the show derives from the show's gothic and horror inspirations rather than a desire to create caricature portrayals. All the characters, women and men, embody this sense of the grotesque, whether they have major or minor roles. The costume designer, by adopting the concept of 'intensifying ugliness', heightens the sense of the gothic and grotesque. Furthermore, the sexual ambiguity and the unpredictable developments of the characters and the narrative (e.g. a

woman turns out to be a man) reflect the complex nature of the show and differentiate *The League* from the classic and stereotypical representations of drag.

The analysis in this section reveals Barre, the costume designer as a key contributor to the creation process influencing the end product, which will be further discussed in *chapter eight* that focuses primarily on issues around the production ecology.

6.2.1   *Silhouette of a Character*

> *The way I work is, once you do your research, once you know where you are going, it's about silhouettes.* Yves Barre, 2012

As noted in *6.1* one of the distinct aspects of *The League* is the fact that there are three actors playing all the main parts. This then heightens the importance of the character silhouettes. Barre explains:

> ... every show I do is like a puzzle and you know twenty pieces in a puzzle – i.e. twenty characters – and... each piece of the puzzle has to be as unique as possible against the other nineteen – fabrics, textures, colours, dye... all those basics of costume design. But with them [the League] of course it was much more complicated... (Interview 2012)

Hence, Barre notes, "... the foundation of *The League*, from a costume point of view is in fact, the silhouette of a character – the outline – that has to be changed every time" (Barre and Gatiss 2005). Barre elaborates:

> I was to give them individual silhouettes. You know the outline of a character. It's not looking at you, it's looking at the silhouette, your silhouette and how you walk and how you stand. I had to really focus on that because subconsciously the silhouette is what gives the audience a character, rather than what colour jumper it is. And that's what I had to focus on. And it is where the paddings came in straight away. (Interview 2012)

In order to differentiate between the characters Barre devised individual sets of paddings for Gatiss, Pemberton and Shearsmith. Barre explains, "[...] each artist had their, what I call a belly-guts padding, they had a head and shoulders, they had

a hip and bums, they had a mid rift – a base – which I devised and used to great effect" (Interview 2012). Barre describes them as almost like "Mikado kits" from where he could pick and choose to form a character's anatomy (Barre and Gatiss 2005). As Gatiss illustrates, "You were able to say, 'We'll have that belly, with those shoulders and that bum' and then you got a new shape" (Barre and Gatiss 2005). By using these paddings, Barre was able to transform an actor's body into the various characters he would perform – a fat old man, a thin old lady and so on.

The paddings that Barre devised are collected in two categories: complex paddings, which were only used for a few characters such as Tubbs (performed by Pemberton), Bernice (performed by Shearsmith) and Lance (performed by Gatiss); and what Barre calls soft paddings, which are relatively simpler and cheaper and were used widely through out the show. Using Tubbs as an example, Barre explains how the complex paddings were made:

> At the time it was really state of the art padding where Steve [Pemberton] would have to go to a sculptor studio, near naked, covered in plaster of Paris [lightweight plaster suitable for moulding]. And then his naked body was turned into a sculpture of his naked body in fibreglass. So there you are, Steve standing naked in fibreglass. And then I decided what the padding had to be and how I could achieve the hunchback and the rows of fat, the sagging tits, the hips and the bum. I had to decide what kind of anatomy Tubbs was going to have when she was naked. And the sculptor would then throw clay on to the naked body – the fibreglass body. And eventually after two or three visits I would say, 'OK that's just right'. Then the sculptor would turn – this is the magic side of it – he would turn the whole thing that was made of clay and fibreglass into foam and latex. A very tricky process. It's almost like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. (Interview 2012)

In terms of the soft paddings, Barre worked with Pad Farmer, in Barre's words, "a great tailor", who sewed the paddings for the designer. Barre also points to other 'tricks' that they used to smooth or to compresses the body shape such as the collar trick that he used for Geoff – explained in *6.1.4*.

Figure 3: Paddings – Reece Shearsmith as Bernice (*The League of Gentlemen Scripts and That*: 64)

Barre notes that the writer/performers did not ask him to create paddings, rather it was the designer who came up with the idea. After his first encounter with *The*

League in 1998 during the Gatehouse Theatre run before the production for the TV show started and his long chats with the writers that followed, the costume designer thought that this approach was necessary for the screen interpretation and would support key aspects of *The League* – immediacy, attention to detail and specificity (Interview 2012). As noted in *4.3* and *6.1.3* during the initial stage shows the performers used minimal props and costumes thus the paddings were completely new to them.

Pemberton (2012), explains that playing one of his favourite characters, Pauline, was great on stage just with glasses and lipstick, but states that it was even better on television when he got to form the character fully with the costumes and paddings. While the writer/performer's words indicate the significance of the costume designer, Barre, on the other hand, notes, "… without their talent [the writer/performers] I wouldn't have pulled it off" (Interview 2012) which all together reveals the collaborative nature of production.

The next example Barre provides demonstrates their success in creating a distinct look for each character:

> … one early sign that we were doing OK, was when the editor on the first series, you know the guy who is cutting [the footage], did not realise it was only three men. We had to tell the editor there were only three men. (Interview 2012)

Pemberton develops this argument, "Someone said the other day, 'There are a load of actors in it and they all look quite similar'. I think it works for the programme. You get the sense that the town is slightly inbred and there aren't many branches on the family tree" (cited in Graham 2000: 29). Hunt reminds us that *Radio Times* (see Graham 2000: 28–29) provided a chart to help audiences recognise who played who in the series (2008: 2). Hunt continues:

It may take time for first-time viewers to work out that Ross, Geoff, Edward and Papa Lazarou are all played by the same person; when Papa terrorizes Bernice at the climax of the Christmas Special, it barely registers that Shearsmith is effectively chasing himself. (2008: 5)

These examples suggest that while the characters were specific and versatile – an aspect the costume designer contributed to – there was – due to three men playing all

the characters – also a sense of familiarity between them, which reinforces the sense of the gothic, absurd and unnatural to the location (anti-pastoral approach in the representation of a small town in the countryside) and its inhabitants (see *chapter three and chapter five*).

Figure 4: Some of the characters Steve Pemberton plays (*The League of Gentlemen Scripts and That*: 346)

6.2.2   *The Issue of Drag & Intensifying Ugliness*

As discussed in *6.1* a key point about *The League* is that it represents specific char-
acters without passing judgement on them; the characters have foundations in real
life and the show offers a complex world and characters that in one way seem to
be confined to stereotypes, while also going beyond these stereotypes. These notions
also informed Barre's paddings and character silhouettes. These elements help us un-
derstand the idea behind the female characters' appearances, their conception and
the actors' performances. Although these female characters might seem grotesque
or exaggerated, their foundations are based on real people or experiences, which are
taken to extremes through themes such as the gothic in everyday life, absurdity and
unpredictability. Sexual ambiguity and the twists in the narratives arguably help over-
come a sense of misogyny and caricature that might appear in the grotesque drag.
This section examines these aspects through the characters Iris and Judee.

Pemberton (Interview 2012) explains that they would not have been able to write
certain scenes, like Pauline and Ross' sex scene (season three episode one), if female
actors were playing the parts. As the three male actor/writers performed most of
the female characters they felt comfortable in writing and performing such intense
scenes. Rodgers (Interview 2012), as their producer and one of the few women within
the primary production team, felt that one of her roles was to watch out for misog-
ynistic elements in the series.

Barre notes that he tried to make the actors dressed like women, less drag-
like and as specific as possible. This was not a suggestion he received from the
writer/performers: "They didn't even have to tell me that" (Interview 2012). It was
the designer who made this creative decision, and it was up to him to deliver it. Barre
explains that the real revelation came to him as he watched the group on stage after
reading the script, "I really realised what this was all about, the parameters and what
I was getting myself into at that point" (Interview 2012). Barre adds that the prin-
cipal aspect for him was that they were "playing women as women, not as men in
drag" which then led him to focus on how he can make these 'women' women. Barre
explains how he put this decision in to practice:

> I had a lot of rules. I discovered that there were a lot of things that I
> couldn't do. One of them was the neck area. The neck area, the blouses
> were always done up – nearly always. Because I could have opened the top
> but then it would have needed prosthetics and we didn't have the money
> to have them, or have the time to have it done either. [...] I discovered
> along the way [...] do's and don'ts [...]. I could do these, I couldn't do
> that. Because I had to go for the feminine. If I put Reece [Shearsmith]
> as a woman I have to make sure that every detail was quite feminine.
> (Interview 2012)

Similar to Barre's remarks, Rodgers notes that although there is an element of
grotesque in the show which comes naturally from the fact that it is men playing
women, it's not drag like Les Dawson (cited in Rodgers 2002: 22). The producer and
the costume designer then point towards what Bruzzi (1997: 166) describes as the ten-
dency for misogyny in drag, the use of costume to pass negative comment on women,
that can be observed in the drag acts of Benny Hill and Les Dawson. To this list we
can also add Monty Python's female characters such as the pepperpots – middle-aged
women wearing unflattering ensembles talking with high-pitched voices, which in a
self-reflective manner resemble men imitating women. Compared to these examples,
Barre's paddings and attention to detail as well as the complex nature of the charac-
ters separate *The League* 'women' from such 'sketchy' female characters. Consider-
ing the above examples Porter (1998) summarises the narrow range of female comic
stereotypes in British comedy as tarts and tyrants. In the 'Northern' context, Alan
Bennett adds 'women as survivors' to these representations as he explains, "... north-
ern women's lives are slung between three poles; dirt, disease and the lavatory. It is
funny, but it's also sad" (cited in Wilmut 1982: 93).

Similar to Rodgers, *The League* writers express that they do not want to associate
themselves with the mother-in-law jokes and crude representations of stereotypical
'Northern' comedy – which can be observed in Les Dawson (Porter 1998; Hunt 2008).
However, interestingly, they also point out, for instance, when creating Iris (a brash
cleaning lady) and Judee (a middle-class 'lady') for *The League* they were inspired
by the characters Cissie and Ada performed by Les Dawson and Roy Barraclough.
For Dyson there is some sort of truth in Dawson's portrayal of Ada, as this character
"was almost an exact double for Grandma Dyson – right down to the absent false

teeth" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2007: 67). Porter describes Cissie and Ada as archetypes of working-class survivors who are "tough, unrefined and unattractive" (1998: 90) while Hunt suggests that Iris is the "younger and more libidinous descendant" of these characters (2008: 58). Hunt's description of Iris is helpful for our analysis, "With her bleached hair, make-up seemingly applied in the dark, hairy mole on her check and ruined teeth, Iris initially resembles some of the crueller stereotypes of unattractive women in vulgar comedy" (2008: 58). Such images performed in drag, for Hunt, "produces a more ambivalent representation, cruel, caricatured, sometimes even misogynist" (2008: 54) and reinforce Bennett's description of the tragicomic 'northern experience', which he identifies through his personal experiences. It also resides with the theme of grotesque bodies observed in English Gothic (*chapter three*). In such grotesque images various organs (genital organs, nose, mouth etc.) are subject to exaggeration and hyperbolisation.

Figure 5: Iris and Judee (*The League of Gentlemen Scripts and That*: 275)

The "exaggerated unattractiveness" that Porter (1998: 90) identifies in drag portrayals is also observed in *The League's* representations. However, the interesting point here is that *The League*'s male characters are presented in a grotesque fashion, too. If we argue that the female characters are all presented via 'northern grotesque' (e.g. Iris' appearance), male characters are also performed in 'grotesque flesh' – e.g.

rotten teeth and unhealthy skin – which challenges suggestions of misogyny. This brings us back to the concept of 'hyper-ugliness' that costume designer Barre developed and applied to his work:

> ...I would go with the rule the uglier the better for me – what was considered ugly in the conventional way, i.e. a pattern, jumper or jacket. The uglier the better for me because that helped me focus and give a unique feel to the town. (Interview 2012)

Barre took the sense of grotesque and exaggeration that the show embodies to new heights by 'intensifying ugliness', a concept he not only applied to the main characters but also to the supporting artists. However, Barre suggests that although one might think that the costumes were exaggerated they were actually based on the people he observed during his research trips to the north of England in preparation for the show (Interview 2012). He also bought most of these clothes from Oxfam shops located in the north. For him the costumes were pretty much 'straight' and were not created 'for laughs' but mainly to develop a certain aura, specificity and uniqueness. While Barre embraces the notions of grotesque and exaggeration linked to gothic inspirations, he rejects the idea of creating 'funny' costumes, which for him would reduce his creations, as well as the nature of the show, to a very simplistic level.

For Iris and Judee, the complex relationship between these characters is another element that separates *The League* from classic drag acts. Iris (performed by Gatiss) and Judee (performed by Shearsmith) are also inspired by Dyson and Gatiss' "affectionate" observations of Dyson's mother and her cleaner (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005d). These observations were more about the relationship between these women than their physical representations. Dyson explains that when the cleaner was working Dyson's mother used to say things such as, "Oh! We went to the opera last night you must go" to which Dyson adds, "I used to sit there cringing, "What is Iris going to learn from opera? She is ironing the shirts..." (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005d). In the series such lines are taken to an extreme degree to develop the class struggle and sado-masochist relationship between Iris and Judee. Throughout the series, while Judee taunts Iris with her expensive lingerie and collection of hotel soaps, Iris torments Judee by ridiculing her non-existent sex life whilst giving vivid details of her own vibrant sexual adventures. The relationship and struggle between these characters reaches its climax at the end of season two, when Judee crosses the line by insulting

Iris' husband. At this point, Iris snaps and overturns the power relations: 'Thinking you're summat when you're nowt. You deluded dried up old witch! With hot flushes and not even a buzzing Phillips Ladyshave between your legs to keep you company on a cold winter's night. I pity you lady!' (season two episode six). After Iris's harsh response Judee collapses into her arms crying, "Oh, Mum!" revealing that they are mother and daughter. In this episode we also learn that Judee's husband is dead but she keeps pretending that he is alive and Iris goes along with it. In the DVD commentaries the writers explain the background story of these characters: Iris gave birth to Judee as a teen and gave her daughter away. Many years later, Judee hired Iris as a cleaner. Soon after Iris discovered they were related. However, this has not changed their employee and employer relationship. Iris and Judee's perverse relationship is taken a step further in the live show *The League of Gentlemen – A Local Show for Local People*, where it is revealed not only that both characters are cleaners who take it in turns to pretend to be their unseen employer, but that they are father and son who have been pretending to be women all along. This unpredictable narrative development and the sexual ambiguity then help the characters break-up the stereotypical drag portrayal. It also taps into the turn of the century theme of heightened anxieties about gender, sexuality, identity and human body due to ambiguities in life, which was discussed in *chapter three*.

6.3   Conclusion

This examination of the characters in *The League* helps us to identify the distinctive components of character, which in turn contribute to the distinctiveness of the series. This chapter illustrated these points through the themes: 'just like real life and a step beyond' and 'character commitment'. *The League* characters are rooted in real people and life experiences, yet they are taken one step further by the writers' as well as the other creative contributors' vision in terms of the visual look and character traits. While we can observe fragments of everyday life or recognisable stereotypes (e.g. 'Northern' women) in the characters, these characters also go beyond clichés or genre expectations by being complex, unpredictable, distinct and fully constructed. This can be observed in the way characters are incarnated as men dressing as women.

The discussions illustrated the writers' artistic ambitions of creating something specific, familiar yet extraordinary. The writers aimed to create complex and fully-formed characters. As the three performers played all the main characters between them, they tried to create very distinctive characters. These aims were also embraced by other contributors, such as the costume designer. For example, the costumes and the paddings helped the actors embody the characters and disappear into them. They helped create a distinct look for each character.

The examples of Papa Lazarou, Iris and Judee support the idea of an ambivalent 'northern' landscape and a fully constructed fictional world inhabited by distinctive characters. Royston Vasey, and its inhabitants, although represented as 'northern' go beyond the connotations associated with this term because of their association with gothic themes, the grotesque, and the unpredictability that is embedded in the text.

Finally this chapter also showed that on screen representations (residents of a small northern town), and the distinct nature of the show, were influenced by off-screen elements such as the individual input of the writers, the executive producer, the producer and the costume designer, as well as wider influences such as organisational strategies, culture and tradition (specifically in the context of BBC2 and Radio 4). Examining the development of characters from stage to television demonstrated the importance of understanding how and when texts are produced as well as who is involved in the creation processes, in order to understand and appreciate the end product. It shows the complexity of creation processes that extends beyond the actual period of production.

The discussions in this chapter shed light on the development of *The League* through a study of its characters (*research question one*). It enriches our understanding of the production ecology of the BBC in the context of *The League* (*research question two*). It also helps us to understand how 'special moments' in TV can occur when other contributors embrace the initial vision of the writers (in this case the stage shows), to 'elevate' and refine this vision through their own creative contribution, knowledge and skill (*research question three*). In the context of *The League* the contribution of the costume designer, who has 'added' to the initial vision by creating paddings and costumes of each character, demonstrates this point. The analysis also revealed that special moments emerge when artistic vision (e.g. the writers' aim to

create complex characters) aligns with administrative elements (e.g. commissioning requirements, BBC 2 audience demographic, and channel tone).

7

NARRATIVE IN THE LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN

This chapter examines narrative in *The League of Gentlemen,* focusing on the TV series. It tells the story of how the series' narrative construction developed through season one, season two, the Christmas Special and season three in chronological order. In doing so it contributes to answering mainly *research question one*: How did the creation process of *The League of Gentlemen* develop? It explores the factors that were influential in shaping the narrative structure of the show (from the writers' inspirations to organisational practices).

The chapter analyses the changes in narrative construction. For instance, series one and two have a similar structure with heavier emphasis on the sketch form, while the Christmas Special and season three take on longer narrative forms. It explores the stage roots of *The League*'s unique storytelling style, its transformation through the series, the people who were involved in the decision-making processes and why these decisions were made. This discussion also contributes to answering *research question two*: How does the television production ecology work within the BBC with particular reference to *The League of Gentlemen* as a case study? The analysis of the decision-making processes in the narrative construction of the show adds to our understanding of the writers', the producers' and the commissioners' professional practices and perspectives.

The presented analysis shows how the series hybridises various genres (comedy, horror, drama) and narrative forms (sketch show, portmanteau film, soap opera). This narrative integration is regarded as one of the original aspects of *The League* that made the show stand out from its contemporaries as well as predecessors (Plowman Interview 2012). This chapter reveals how the narrative element that made the show 'special' was developed (*research question three*).

7.1   Genre Hybridity

The League's genre hybridisation can be charted as: comedy sketch and sitcom, horror (both psychological and super-natural), and drama, including elements from soap opera, crime and 'post-modern' drama. This section explores these genres and illustrates the way in which the League incorporates aspects of them into its storytelling style.

The key elements of genres are character types, setting, iconography, narrative and style (Lacey 2000: 133). Writers such as Lacey (2000), and Feuer (1992), stress the significance of narrative forms and conventions in understanding genre (see also 2.4). In terms of storytelling, it is essential to address the difference between series and serials. Series have self-contained episodes and relatively autonomous plotlines while serials use continuing storylines over an extended period of time (Ellis 1982; McCarthy 2001: 47). However, as television genres become increasingly hybridised, the limits of genre definition becomes more apparent (see Feuer 1992; Turner 2001).

Comedy sketches are simple narrative forms often structured as short single-scenes (Neale and Krutnik 1990; Neale 2001). Generally they consist of a setting, one or more characters, an internal time frame within which the comic possibilities of a premise – e.g. a situation, a relationship, a conversation, etc. – are either pursued to a climax and conclusion or simply abandoned (Neale 2001: 62). From origins in nineteenth- and twentieth-century variety theatre (see 3.2.3), the sketch show format consists of non-narrative structures such as one-off jokes, one-liners, and gags. The format only offers minimal narrative content (Neale and Krutnik 1990: 57) and is formed by combining different items. Another characteristic is the use of recurrent catchphrases and characters, which work through repetition rather than development. *The League*'s Professor Breastpinched sketches are examples of the classical sketch form. This character does market research on the streets of Royston Vasey by asking a single question to the passers by "Do you like your breast pinched?" Every sketch lasts about one minute revolving around him asking the same question and people's reactions. These sketches offer no narrative or character development.

The situation comedy with its larger narrative form "sits between 'sketch comedy' and 'situation drama', especially continuous serials and episodic series..." (Hart-

ley 2001: 65). Sitcoms carry a problem/resolution or destabilisation/restabilisation structure. They start off with a familiar status quo, which is disrupted or threatened with destabilisation. By the end this is resolved and the situation returns to the initial status quo (Neale and Krutnik 1990: 234; Feuer 2001: 69). However, it is important to note that the sitcom format has changed (Hartley 2001: 65). For example, initially seen as episodic series where a situation comes to an end within each episode, sitcoms can also contain serial elements including narrative arcs that run through episodes or seasons (Neale and Krutnik 1990: 229; Turner 2001: 6). *The League*'s local shop sketches provide good examples of this (see Hunt 2008: 58–59). In various episodes the shop owners, who like to keep the town 'local', are threatened by strangers coming into Royston Vasey. By the end of each episode, they solve this situation by murdering the 'foreigners', thus returning to the initial state. It is also common to see sitcoms about small/rural-town settings that either focus on 'eccentric' characters or the banalities of small-town life (Neale and Krutnik 1990: 230–231), which *The League* taps into. Sitcoms are divided into two groups: family and workplace (Feuer 2001). The local shop strand focuses on the lives of the couple who run the shop, and thus falls into both of these categories.

Soap opera's serialised narrative form is the core feature of shows created within this format (McCarthy 2001) encompassing: multiple plotlines, each developing at an independent pace; the completion of one story leading into others; ongoing plots incorporating parts of semi-resolved conflicts; events unfolding without there being a definitive end to the narrative; situations and characters growing organically; and ongoing arcs making dramatic reversals, revelations and emotional reorientations (Cantor and Pingree 1983: 23; Feuer 1986: 109; Neale and Krutnik 1990: 233; McCarthy 2001: 47). Other significant features are multiple characters, a regular community and/or family setting and an emphasis on human relationships within families and communities (Cassate 1985: 140; Neale and Krutnik 1990: 233; Hartley 2001: 66). *The League*'s setting, then, provides links to both sitcoms and soap operas as it focuses on Royston Vasey residents as a community and different households within that community, such as the Dentons and the Hulls. If we look at Charlie and Stella Hull we can observe soap opera type storylines, focusing on the couple's troubled relationship and their emotional turmoil. Throughout the series the narrative reflects several revelations, such as Stella's gambling problem, her affairs with other

men and the loss of their daughter when she was a baby. This shows how close comedy can be to melodrama, both in terms of content and structural features (Neale and Krutnik 1990: 13) – discussed in *chapter three* and *chapter five* as the comedy of embarrassment and horror of social discomfort.

The local shop sketches about serial-killer-shop-owners introduce features of horror, suspense and crime. The setting, a small town in the countryside reflects the horror roots of this strand (see *chapter three* and *chapter five*). The shop owners' odd behaviours such as breastfeeding pigs, their incestuous relationship (they are spouses and siblings), and their monster like son (whom we never see in person but only his shadow which resembles a werewolf) tap into the anti-pastoral horror story (see *chapter three*). All the way through, the series plays out the connections between horror and comedy, such as the tension and relief structure (see *chapter three*). The horror connection becomes even more evident in the Christmas Special as it takes the form of a horror portmanteau film with its four mini horror narratives fed with dark comedy.

Arguably, with its serial nature and more rigorous mixing of style and genres, season three moves towards being a 'post-modern' drama. Post-modern drama involves the rejection of historical authenticity, mixing styles and genres to a point that they are no longer stable, and suggesting multiple ironic readings and narrative possibilities that undermine contemporary certainties (Collins 1992; Page 2001). While the mixing of styles and genres, and the suggestion of various readings is also observed in season one and two, season three's serial nature takes it a step further. In part the series' mix of tone has to do with the group's writing arrangements where different writing pairs have different styles (Hunt 2008). For example, Rodgers (Interview 2012) suggests that while Pemberton and Shearsmith tend to bring out soap opera elements in their writing, Gatiss and Dyson tend to bring out the gothic elements.

As argued in *chapter six, The League* uses familiarity in order to break down expectations and create a completely new fictional world with different and unpredictable rules. This links to post-modern drama's ability to suggest multiple ironic readings and narrative possibilities. The narrative twists in season three reflect this post-modern essence. For example, in season three the transsexual cab driver Barbara, after having a sex change operation administered by the town vet, gets pregnant as a result of her relations with the local shop owner's monstrous son, and ends

up with twins. Papa Lazarou's story also supports the uncertainties and ironic possibilities of the narrative. In season two Papa Lazarou comes across as a grotesque idiot. He seems to be wearing an inverted clown make-up. He tries to kidnap people and, rather unconvincingly, pretends to talk to dead people. In season three Papa returns in the final episode, this time as a mystic character. Here we learn that Papa has been alive for hundreds of years throughout which he has been imprisoning the people he kidnapped inside his circus animals, where these people continue to live. These examples illustrate that the narrative complexities of the series support the discussions in *chapter five* and *six* on location and characters, which indicated that the show presents something familiar yet also extra-ordinary. These narrative complexities help *The League* move away from cliché representations and present a unique and specific world with its own odd rules.

7.2 Sketch Format & Narrative Development

The League's journey through various media is reflected in the changes in its narrative form, as it gradually became more complex, particularly in the TV series, over four years. This section explores the changes in the narrative nature of *The League* from the stage performances to radio and finally to television. It illustrates a) the development of the narrative arcs that ran through the series, and b) the structure of the sketch strands with a focus on the first two seasons. The analysis reveals the connection between character development and narrative development. It also demonstrates that *The League*'s unique style of story-telling (character and narrative development) within the sketch format took shape through the stage performances but was further developed in the radio and television incarnations through the contribution of their first producer. This section, then, offers insight into the working relationships between the writers and the producer, as well as into the producer's role.

7.2.1   *Narrative Arcs*

For Rodgers (Interview 2012) the roots of the TV format (mix of sketches and serial arcs) particularly for season one and two lie in the radio series. Rodgers argues that during the development of the first season of the TV show, which came right after the radio series, there was a big debate about further changes:

> [...] as I remember Sarah [Sarah Smith the producer of the radio show and the TV series season one] was the one who really wanted the serial arc and the story, and the boys wanted to keep much more as a sort of, not traditional sketch show but more sketches and worry less about this sort of narrative arc. (Interview 2012)

This takes us back to the discussions on the formation of the location and Sarah Smith's influence on this aspect (see *chapter five*). Smith along with wanting to set all the sketches in one place – which came up during the production of the radio show – thought it was important to develop narrative arcs and create a more serial feel for the TV series. Plowman (the executive producer of the TV series) has a distinct perspective on the format of the show:

> [...] we shouldn't kid ourselves. It was a sketch show in which Sarah's idea of putting it all in one place made it appear to be something else. But it was essentially a sketch show. It was a series of characters who did funny things. And it appeared to have a story but it didn't have a story. (Interview 2012)

Plowman (Interview 2012) argues that there was an illusion of narrative continuity and character development, which was created by the order of the sketches, the location and the visual background. For example, in the first scene of the series we see Benjamin (performed by Shearsmith) arriving in Royston Vasey by train. We learn that he is coming to the town to stay with his relatives (the Dentons) for a short while, before meeting his friend Martin to go on a hiking trip. In the next scene we see a hiker arriving in Royston Vasey from the moors and walking towards the local shop passing the Royston Vasey sign, which reads "Welcome to Royston Vasey. You'll never leave". In the third scene we see Benjamin getting into Barbara's taxi and going off to his relative's place (first Barbara sketch). This is followed by the

first local shop sketch, where the hiker, who turns out to be Martin, goes into the local shop and meets the owners Tubbs and Edward. Later on in the episode we see the second local shop sketch where a police officer arrives in the shop in search of Martin. By the end of the first episode we learn that Tubbs and Edward killed both Martin and the police officer, while Benjamin settles in with the Dentons waiting for Martin. From this point on Benjamin becomes part of the Dentons strand while the local shop becomes a strand in itself. Plowman adds:

> So it appears to have a plot, but it doesn't really. I mean there is Hillary Briss and meat and they are selling human flesh [the special stuff story-line]. And I kept talking to them [the writers], or at least via Sarah maybe about whether it needed more plot. Whether we needed or wanted to follow Benjamin and his adventures... (Interview 2012)

The writers point to two storylines that run through the first two seasons: the new road and the special stuff / the nosebleed epidemic. While the new road dominates season one, the second season is dominated by the special stuff and the nosebleed epidemic. The new road storyline develops from the local shop strand. The owners of the shop, Tubbs and Edward, who desperately try to keep the town 'local' and murder every 'stranger' they come across, learn that a new road will be built in order to liven up the economy of the town – bring more tourists and create more jobs. The shop owners/serial killers try their best to stop the new road being built. The road is also linked to other characters such as three businessmen working in the industrial plant who hope that the road will open soon, as this, presumably, will vitalize the local economy. However, in this strand, like many others, the road storyline only appears as a backdrop while the relationship between these three men is the dominant feature. Gatiss describes the road story as "the kind of spine for the series" yet adds, "which we agonised over" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005d). Shearsmith explains that the new road story-line was "lightly sketched in" to provide "continuity over the six episodes" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005d). Shearsmith notes that from the writers' perspective the characters were the fore-front of the show, but suggests that the narrative became a big hit among their audiences:

[...] people very quickly get into a story and want to know what hap-
pens next despite the fact that really it's not a story, it's just a device to
seemingly look like you got a through line. (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005d)

Similarly, Gatiss suggests that the viewers were attracted to what he describes as
the 'soap element' and states, "They really wanted to know what was happening
next and it became a big feature" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005d). Their comments
on narrative resonate with their outlook on the location, which initially was not a
particularly key aspect of the show for them, yet arguably became popular among
the viewers (see *chapter five*). If we accept that the audiences were attracted to the
location and the storylines, then this was partly the first producer's success, as she
was the one who pushed for creating them.

The second storyline – 'the special stuff' – is linked to the character Hillary Briss,
the butcher of the town. In the first and second season Hillary sells what he and his
exclusive customers call 'the special stuff' under the counter, with no indication as to
what it is. Gatiss explains the inspiration behind the character and the story, "Hillary
came about because we were encouraged to write things brand new for the television
series and we just came up with this thing, a sort of unspoken thing" (Dyson, Gatiss
et al. 2005d). Dyson describes it as, "Something so terrible that you couldn't talk
about it. And at this point we never knew what the special stuff was when we started.
We just said to ourselves, 'Let's just write as if it's the worst thing you can think
of'" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005d). In the second season 'the special stuff' storyline
evolves. Season two sees the emergence of what at first seems to be a new storyline,
the nosebleed epidemic. We see the town's people dying due to nosebleeds. As the
series progress it becomes clear that it is the special stuff that caused the epidemic.
At the end of season two Hillary flees the country and sets up a barbeque joint in
Jamaica. Pointing to the curiosity of the viewers and their urge to understand the
narrative Pemberton notes, "My auntie came to see the show and she saw the sketch
and all this mystery around this meat and she took me to one side after screening
and said, 'Steven, is it sausages?'" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005d).

Although the writers and the executive producer believe that the storylines are
lightly sketched in, the narrative continuity, or the illusion of it, is still a key aspect
for *The League*. Rodgers (Interview 2012) argues that the format – a mix of sketch
show and serial form was incredibly important to the TV show's present and fu-

Figure 1: Hillary Briss, the butcher

Figure 2: The Special Stuff – Season One Episode Five

ture success. For Rodgers "the format was a blessing and a curse" (Interview 2012). Rodgers thinks that it was a curse because it "ended up running the show" as they spent a lot of time filming these segments. She explains that although those segments did not take up much screen time she thinks that they could potentially have used that time to do funnier bits. However, looking back Rodgers (Interview 2012) is glad that they did it:

> It made it different. And I think it's definitely what's given it longevity. It meant people could go back and see different things and actually notice all the work we put into the bloody thing. The amount of hours spent plotting how many crosses on doors and who had to have a nosebleed ... A lot of stuff... (Interview 2012)

This example reveals the first producer Sarah Smith's influence on the creation of narrative arcs and the 'illusion' of narrative continuity. It illustrates that although the writers and the then associate producer Jemma Rodgers had their doubts, they still followed the producer's lead. Their assumptions about the audience reactions indicate that narrative arcs became popular among their audiences.

7.2.2 *Sketch Structures in Season One & Two*

This section explores how the League's stage backgrounds influenced the TV incarnation in terms of creating their unique way of storytelling within the sketch format. Along with the larger narrative arcs that run through the series there are also character plots that run through different sketch strands. Pemberton (Interview 2012) notes that their initial sketch structures for the stage shows already had the essence of narrative and character development. This, for Pemberton and Plowman, is what made them stand out at the time (Interviews 2012). Pemberton explains the format of the stage shows:

> [...] the first part of the evening you would be introduced to a character, the second part of the evening that character would be taken on a little bit and people really responded to that. I think a lot of sketches are... just pen drawing, line drawing. So there is not a lot of... substance in them. And I think having this structure which we sort of hit upon, returning

to the same characters really gave them substance, in the audience's eye as well. And we found that people responded. By the end of the evening they felt that they got to know three or four or five of these characters. So that's the structure we had. We would have some random sketches and we would have some two parters – two Paulines or local shops or two Herr Lipps or Dentons or whatever it was, which told a bit of a story. (Interview 2012)

This structure reflects the writers' commitment to character and how they offer character development through their sketch structures. After learning about Plowman's comments – as noted in 6.1 – that for him the originality of the League is that they do not step outside of the characters but disappear into them, Pemberton notes:

Yes! I think that's a nice point to make... And this came out by doing these multiple episodes, if you like, when we were on stage [...] You could take a character like Pauline who was horrific and horrible and it was a satire of wild women you get in job centres and that would have been what the character was. But the fact that we kept going back to it, I started to really like the character, and then my favourite sketch was where they do the role reversal, the job interview, and they swap roles and you see a huge vulnerability when she is playing the person applying for the job. And these little kind of clues as to her personality and inner sadness that led her to be the way she was. And to me all of that's something that I like to use in writing. And Tubbs has it, Herr Lipp has it, Pauline has it. Monstrous characters who do monstrous things but actually everyone is a human being, everyone is the way they are for many reasons. So don't just play one colour. So don't comment on it. I mean the first sketch will always be a slightly satirical type of thing but because we are actors, we enjoy going a bit deeper and a bit deeper... (Interview 2012)

Pemberton also points out the influence of their theatre backgrounds (see 4.3) on their style of storytelling, in which sketches provide complete narratives:

Well, a lot of sketch shows at the time were ramshackle affairs, people didn't really dress up, they didn't really make much effort, they would slope on and off. We saw sketch shows where people got to the end and

went, 'Ah! That's it. We haven't got an ending for this. So we are just going to walk off now.' We were against all of that and partly because I've come through this thing of doing a theatre company. It had to be polished, theatrical ... (Interview 2012)

Instead of the more simplistic approach classic sketch shows take, in terms of character and narrative development, the League chose to provide fully formed stories via two part sketches in which the narrative developed as the actors returned to these characters in each performance. Here, character development is very much linked to narrative development. The TV series worked with the similar structure that was adopted for the initial stage performances. A significant difference is that now these two-part sketches formed the main strands, which offered stronger narrative continuity as they were supported by a location and larger narrative arcs. 7.2.3 explores the job seekers strand to illustrate how the two-part sketch structure works in terms of narrative and character development.

7.2.3 *Pauline & the Job Seekers Strand*

The two-part structure is used in most of the main sketch strands in the TV show. In the job seekers strand although the sketches in the first two episodes fit in to a more traditional sketch form (simple characters, repetition of status quo and sense of satire) after the third episode the narrative and the characters start to thicken. The narrative and the character development grow organically similar to a soap opera structure. Thus, the show provides more narrative development than traditional sketch format. This evidences the hybrid nature of the show.

Shearsmith explains the birth of Pauline:

[...] that was my restart officer from the olden times. And she was just a character. It was just there. Not quite like Pauline now, but I mean, I remember coming back everyday with stories about her, and it was just brilliant. (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i)

The League's Pauline is a wild and cruel woman, a restart course officer who is hostile towards the course attendees. Her famous phrase is 'Hokey cokey, pig in a pokey!'

and like the person Shearmith was inspired by, Pauline is also obsessed with pens. As the writer explains, one of the lines he took from his restart officer was, "...'Can I have the pens? They are gold to us around here"' (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i). The other two main characters here are two job seekers Mickey (a naïve, childish and unintelligent young man) and Ross (the most clever person within the group who at the beginning of the series represents the voice of reason). The job seekers strand visually resembles 1970s and 1980s British social realist films with its grainy and bleak images filmed with smoke (*chapter three*). This adds another element to Pauline. As the course leader and the only woman in the classroom she represents the powerful woman who crushes unemployed men with her status and hostile attitude (see *chapter three*). The visual element, which enforces various meanings to the text and the characters, was added during the filming process by the director Steve Bendelack and the D.O.P Rob Kitzman (Rodgers Interview, 2012; Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005d). This illustrates the contribution of these two professionals not only to the look of the show but also to its content as their visual addition allows for various interpretations of the characters.

Figure 3: The Restart Course

Figure 4: Pauline

Figure 5: Mickey and Ross

The first episode with a two-part sketch introduces Pauline, Ross and Mickey. The first part starts off with Pauline walking into the classroom:

> Hokey, cokey, pig in a pokey. Hello, gents! It's half past nine. Time for men, men with jobs to go to work. Other men stay in bed 'till dinner time watching Tots TV, thinking about how worthless and pathetic they are. Good morning job-seekers!

In this sketch Pauline tries to get the group to list professions to help them realise what their job options are. Ross gets upset about the way Pauline treats them and starts to shout out job titles including tinker, tailor, soldier, spy and astronaut. Without realising Ross' intent Pauline tries to write all these down, yet gets irritated, as she cannot keep up with him. With the tension reaching a climax, Pauline yells, "You can shout out as many jobs as you like Ross. You'll never bloody get one you worthless dole scum!"

In the second part Mickey wants to leave the class for a job interview. Pauline does not want to let him go. Ross starts to argue with her to protect Mickey. Pauline says, "Where would I be if you all got work before the end of this course?" Mr Wadilove, another job seeker answers, "On the dole". Pauline replies, "Exactly! I'd be sat here next to Mr Wadilove stinking of shit. This is my job we are talking about." Ross disagrees, "No it's not. It's Mickey's job. You go, Mickey!" While Ross and Pauline keep arguing, Mickey gathers the courage to speak, "Please, Pauline. I feel confident." Pauline replies, "Well you look ridiculous. I know they put monkeys in space, but do you really think they'll let one drive a fire engine. Sit down!" In the DVD commentaries right at this point of the sketch the writers comment how cruel Pauline is. Shearsmith notes, "There is no justification for her action here" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005c). Pemberton adds, "Well, at this stage people don't like Pauline but…They come to love her" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005c).

The second episode offers another two-parter, which again focuses on Pauline's cruelty. While Pauline's dark side continues to dominate in the second episode, the turning point that Pemberton (Interview 2012) notes comes in the third episode (see 7.2.1). This is where characters and narrative start to gain more depth. Here, Pauline talks about interview techniques and wants to demonstrate how to behave in an interview with a role-play exercise. In the first part Pauline plays the employer and in-

terviews Mickey for, as Pauline describes, 'shoving trolleys around ASDA car park'. By the end of the interview Pauline says, "...Thank you, Mickey. That was a perfect example, everybody, of how not to conduct yourself at interview. He slouched, he swore. He came across as a man who had shit for brains, didn't you, cherub."

Then Pauline asks someone to come up to interview her so that she can demonstrate to the group the right way. Ross volunteers. Shearsmith notes that Ross sees this as an opportunity for revenge. The second part starts off with Ross interviewing Pauline.

> Ross: And you are interested in the trolley job?
>
> Pauline: That is right, I am very interested, yes. I feel that my ability to work well as part of a team and yet take individual responsibility are important factors in a job of this nature.
>
> Ross: What work experience do you have?
>
> Pauline: I left school early started...
>
> Ross: So you didn't go to collage?
>
> Pauline: No, but I had actual work experience...
>
> Ross: So you have no qualifications
>
> Pauline: Well if you don't count twenty years in the Employment Service.
>
> Ross: Well, no I don't. I'm talking about academic achievement. Degrees, diplomas.
>
> Pauline: Come off it Ross! Shoving a trolley around ASDA car park, a frigging monkey could do it.
>
> Ross: Would you say you are a fairly egregious person?
>
> Pauline: What?
>
> Ross: Are you an egregious person? Do you have an egregious personality?
>
> Pauline: Umm... Yeah, I do, yeah.
>
> Ross: I'll say some other words to you. Now, I want you to reply with the first thing that comes to your head. Alright?
>
> Pauline: Alright.
>
> Ross: Home.
>
> Pauline: Royston Vasey.
>
> Ross: Family.
>
> Pauline: Dead.

> Ross: Friends.
>
> Pauline: Pens.
>
> Ross: No, friends?
>
> Pauline: Pens. They're the best friends you can have. Everything I know about people, I've learned from pens. If they don't work, you shake them. If they still don't work you chuck them away. Bin them!
>
> Ross: Really? Work.
>
> Pauline: Everything. My work is everything to me.
>
> Ross: Love.
>
> Pauline: No. somebody once but...
>
> Ross: And can I get your age?
>
> Pauline: That's a lady's prerogative.
>
> Ross: For the records.
>
> Pauline: Let's just say I'm as old as me gums...
>
> Ross: How old are you!?
>
> Pauline: Forty-eight! [Pauline stands up. Reaches out to Ross to shake his hand] Thank you very much, when do I start?
>
> Ross: Oh, I'm sorry, I can't offer you this position.
>
> Pauline: You what? [Pauline sits down again, looking upset]
>
> Ross: You failed the interview. You strike me as a bully. You're ill-mannered, ignorant and foul-mouthed. You're not qualified for this job, and apart from anything else... you are too old. Miss.

Pauline sits in silence looking devastated for a while. A few seconds later she attacks Ross. Shearsmith notes, "Everyone forgives her suddenly at this point" as the audience gets to know more about Pauline (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005e). Getting to know a character, as Pemberton's earlier remarks suggest, comes from the structure of the sketches. As the series evolve we get to know more about Pauline and her vulnerabilities. By the end of the third season it becomes hard not to root for her in her conflict with Ross.

The job seekers sketches continue as two-parters in every episode. Season one ends with the revelation that Ross has been running an internal investigation for the Social Services assessing Pauline's work. Ross explains that his report has all the evidence

Figure 6: The Interview Scene with Pauline and Ross – Season One Episode Three

he needs for Pauline's instant dismissal. Ross does not only threaten to get Pauline fired but confiscates her beloved pens, too.

The two part structure continues in season two. In season two episode one we learn that Pauline has lost her job and now is going to the restart course herself. In season two episode two Pauline gets a job offer for 'assistant food science operative' (sketch part one), which turns out to be working at a "grotty burger bar" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2003: 208) with Mickey. In the second part of the sketch the duo are caught on camera spitting in Ross' burger when he comes in as a customer not knowing that Pauline works there. In the next episode Ross breaks the news that Pauline is dismissed from her work, which means that her and Mickey's benefits will be suspended. Pauline tries to plead with Ross saying that she has changed. Again we see Ross' dark side emerge as he asks her to beg him.

After this bitter confrontation Pauline kidnaps Ross with the help of Mickey. They tie Ross up in a chair in the restart classroom. The trio stay in the classroom for days with no connection to the outside world not realising that there is a major nosebleed outbreak in the town. In episode five Pauline gets out to buy some sandwiches (first

part of the sketch). When she returns she finds a note written by Mickey explaining that Ross has tricked him into untying him and then escaped. A few seconds after Pauline finishes reading the note Ross turns up with a police officer (second part).

The analysis of the sketches in the first two seasons demonstrates that the division of the sketches into two parts within each episode creates narrative and character development, which cannot be observed in the traditional sketch format. This approach makes *The League* stand out from other sketch shows making it special. In season three Pauline's story develops and she finds herself in prison. However, here a different approach to narrative is adopted compared to season one and two.

7.3 Episode Structure in Season One & Two

Focusing on season one episode five, sections 7.3, 7.4 and 7.5 illustrate the episode structure in seasons one and two in detail. They explore how sketch strands, one-off sketches, linking devices, title sequences and gags function in terms of the narrative construction of the show. This structure is one of the elements that make *The League* stand out from its contemporaries and predecessors. 7.3 charts the breakdown of the scenes in season one episode five, which reveals that the order of the scenes suggests the passing of time, creates a time line and the 'illusion' of narrative continuity for the events taking place on this specific day in Royston Vasey. This represents an innovation on the traditional sketch show format. It also reveals how TV as a medium allowed the team to develop more elaborate storylines.

In season one and two each episode focuses on several main strands (each strand is represented through two-part sketches). There are also some one-part sketches based on recurring characters as well as one-off sketches with characters that appear only once. In between there are linking devices, generally in the shape of a moving vehicle (e.g. cab, bicycle, pram). There are also short gags, which are called 'quickies'. These gags are sometimes continuous throughout one episode or more, and sometimes they appear only once. Jemma Rodgers (Interview 2012) explains that in the first two seasons the writers would start off by writing stand-alone sketches about specific characters. This was because they wrote as pairs (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005b). Then, as a whole group, they would develop a narrative arc. Afterwards, they would

combine the character strands, the narrative arcs, small gags, one-off sketches and title sequences. During this mixing stage, they would tweak, for example, the one-off sketches so that they would fit into the flow of the narrative.

Season one episode five follows five main strands:

- Three businessmen, Geoff, Mike and Brian (about Mike's wedding),

- The Dentons and Benjamin (about Benjamin's attempt to escape his relatives' home and Royston Vasey),

- Barbara, the transsexual cab driver (about Barbara's search for love through lonely hearts columns),

- Hillary, the butcher and the 'special stuff' narrative arc (where Hillary feeds the wedding guests with the special stuff and it is revealed that the special stuff is highly addictive),

- Henry and Ally, the horror film fans (where the duo goes to the cinema).

Apart from these strands there are three one-part sketches with characters that frequently appear. These are:

- Bernice the vicar who marries the couple,

- Les McQueen (ex-musician) who has an awkward conversation with the band that will play at the wedding,

- Earnest Foot who has an awkward conversation with another guest at the wedding.

The wedding appears to be the wider narrative in this episode that encapsulates other sketches. These one-parters are planted within this wider narrative. However, they do not progress the wedding story. These sketches could be planted in another context and setting without even changing much of the writing. They just carry out the stories of the characters they focus on. Here, as is the case throughout series one and two, the 'Barbara' sketches function in two ways: a) as a sketch strand with a specific story – Barbara's sex change operation and search for companionship, and b) as a linking device, where Barbara in her taxi takes us from a to b – one sketch or one location to another (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i). Linking devices such as this create a sense of continuity and wholeness within the sketch show format.

In total there are seventeen parts in this episode including the title sequence – which is different for every episode. The episode starts off at the church where the wedding takes place (vicar sketch). Then we see Barbara driving through the high street (with a big bow wrapped around the cab), which links us to the title sequence where we see short gags with various characters (main and supporting characters). For example, about a minute in, we see a woman struggling to get out of a betting office with a pram. She sees a man walking by and asks him to give her a hand. The man helps her carry the pram out of the betting office. Just when they put the pram out on the high street the woman says, "just a little further".

Figure 7: Pram gag part one – Season One Episode Five

The scene after the title sequence, we see Barbara parked outside the church waiting for the newlyweds. Here, the first part of the three businessmen sketch occurs. The sketch ends with Barbara driving off with the newlyweds while Geoff (the best man) and other guests wave after the cab. Next, we have the Dentons sketch, sandwiched between the previous sketch outside the church and the subsequent sketch at the wedding party. We see Geoff making the last arrangements for the party, which tells us that a certain amount of time has passed as he travelled from the church to the wedding venue. This scene, however, revolves around Les who walks in to the

venue (one part sketch). From here we cut to the lady and the man still carrying the pram now in the suburbs. Next, we jump to Henry and Ally walking in to the cinema (first part of the sketch). Then we go back to the wedding where the one part Earnest Foot sketch occurs (single sketch). This is followed by a sketch with Barbara and Benjamin, which connects their stories. Benjamin calls Barbara's cab service to book a cab for escaping from his relative's (the Dentons) house, while Barbara thinks Benjamin is calling to arrange a date.

Figure 8: The guests waving after the cab – Season One Episode Five.

Next, eleven minutes in, we see the woman and the man carrying the pram on the moors. It seems like they have carried the pram all the way from the High Street to here, which creates the illusion of the passing of time. The woman says, "Nearly there." The camera goes from a medium shot to an extreme wide shot, through which we realise that they are way up on the moors and as the camera slowly moves down we find out that there is nothing else around but the caves. This camera movement brings us to the one-off cave guide sketch. While the camera is moving down we can hear the cave guide's voice. The camera stops right in front of the cave entrance where the cave guide gives instructions to the visitors before they go in, which marks the beginning of the sketch.

Figure 9: Pram gag part two, on the moors – Season one Episode Five

After the cave guide sketch we return to town to the second part of the cinema sketch. This is followed by the scene where Benjamin waits for Barbara to pick him up in front of the butcher's. Barbara picks Benjamin up nineteen minutes in to the episode outside the butcher's shop. At this point we presume that it is late in the afternoon, as the sky is just getting darker. This scene also works as a linking device to the events related to the 'special stuff' story, as we see a man outside the butcher shop looking in. This is followed by the second instalment of the three businessmen sketch. Then, we go back to Barbara and Benjamin. It is night-time. Barbara's cab pulls up somewhere remote in the moors where we can see the lights of the town far away. Barbara tries to make love with Benjamin only to realise that there has been a misunderstanding. Barbara asks Benjamin to get out as she feels very embarrassed and drives off. In the next scene we go back to the butcher's where the same man from the previous scene is still waiting outside the shop. This develops into a special stuff sketch with Hillary the butcher. From here we go back to the moors to Benjamin. Twenty-eight minutes into the episode the fourth part of the pram gag takes place as Benjamin bumps into the woman struggling to push the pram by herself. He helps her carry the pram from the moors to the main road. Just when he starts to walk

away, she says, "Oh actually, it's just a bit further. Thanks." Benjamin turns back and they keep on carrying the pram. The camera in a close up reveals what is inside the pram. The man who was helping the woman at the beginning of the episode is now sleeping in it with a baby soother in his mouth. Benjamin and the lady carry the pram off the screen in the middle of the night as the credits role.

Figure 10: Pram gag part three – Season One Episode Five.

The significant difference in the TV series, as opposed to the stage shows, is the attention to the chronology of events. For example, within scenes small details link sketches together creating a timeline and narrative flow. For example, the Les Mc-Queen sketch that takes place in the wedding venue starts off with Les walking on the street and entering the venue. This is cut to the inside of the venue where we see Geoff speaking with the guitarist who will be entertaining the guests. Geoff has a short conversation with him and then leaves the frame seconds before Les enters. This sketch is very much about Les, but having Geoff in it keeps the sketches intact. Yet, during the stage performances the group had to follow the straightforward sketch format as there are only three performers playing all the characters. For instance, in this episode Shearmsith appears as Geoff in the sketch outside the church, then in the next scene he plays Benjamin in the Dentons sketch, and following that he appears

as Geoff at the wedding venue in order to keep Les' sketch linked in with the rest of the story.

Figure 11: Geoff (played by Shearsmith) arrives to the wedding venue – Season One Episode Five

Figure 12: Benjamin (played by Shearsmith) waiting outside the butcher's – Season One Episode Five.

7.4   One-off Sketches

Focusing on 'the cave guide' sketch – also known as 'Stump Hole Caverns' – that takes place in season one episode five, this section explores the contribution of one-off sketches to the narrative construction. "Stump Hole Caverns" is a monologue that has been a key feature in all of *The League*'s incarnations – early stage shows, radio and television series as well as the latest live tours. This item is about a grief-stricken cave guide, Mike McNamara, haunted by a tragic school trip accident where a boy dies under his supervision (Dyson 2000). The story takes place during a tour of the caves, where the guide reveals past events. This five-minute segment has no connection to the sketch strands or to the wider narrative arcs. It primarily reflects the passing of time, and helps reveal the sketch structures within the show. Second, it a) helps create a more complete picture of the location and the sense of place; b) underlines the comedy style of the show – a mixture of comedy, tragedy, and horror; c) showcases the actors' performance skills; and d) reflects the show's stage roots.

Dyson explains that the idea of a cave tour sketch started off as "a straightforward attempt at a spoof of a cave guide" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005f). During re-writes Gatiss came up with the idea of a dead child. This sub-plot was then planted into the original idea, and keeps surfacing within the straightforward flow of the initial narrative (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005f). The structure of the sketch reveals that although the first part of the sketch comes across as a parody of a character, it develops in a more complex manner, revealing a more complex situation. The complexity signifies that nothing is what it appears in Royston Vasey (*chapter five* and *six*).

Figure 13: Cave guide sketch – Season One Episode Five.

Mick is instantly recognisable as a parody of a cave guide. His physical look is an important element of this spoof, including his clothes (his glasses, tiny shorts and long colourful socks) and his beard. Gatiss explains that his shorts are a reflection of Mick's personality and provide a hint for the audience to decoding his character: "Edgar Wright suggested the tiny shorts because he used to work in a cave. And he said all the guides who are like Mick who all fancy themselves a bit used to wear crammingly tiny shorts for the ladies" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005f).

While the way the story unfolds lifts the sketch, it is the delivery of the lines that makes it complete. Mick speaks with a very dull voice, which Gatiss describes as "completely blank" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005f). For Gatiss delivering such an intense story with such bleakness felt like a "real discovery" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005f). As the story unfolds another dimension is added to this character. While, at first, the bleakness of Mick's voice signifies his dull personality, half way into the sketch the voice starts to signify depression and guilt. The confession starts off with Mick stating:

This particular cavern might already be familiar to you from its countless appearances on the small screen. In 1974 you couldn't move down here from cybermen. In fact there was a rather amusing incident in which Tom Baker sprained his ankle on that rock over there. This goes to show how easy accidents happen.

After a pause Mick starts listing other celebrities who have visited the caves and continues:

At this stage I like to raise the subject of darkness. You know there is nothing quite like the darkness you get down here in the caves and to illustrate this we do like to turn out the lights – just for a few moments. (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2003: 134)

Mick switches off all the lights in the cave including his torch. As we stare at the dark frame Mick continues, "I myself am not fond of the darkness. I sleep with the lights on now. It's in the darkness that I see the boy's face. Eyes bulging. Tongue out. Black" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2003: 134). After this startling confession, Mick clicks the lights back on and continues the tour right from where he left off. As if nothing has happened, he continues listing the comedic names that some of the limestone formations resemble. The list includes random names such as Santa Claus, The Specimen Jar, and Errol Flynn. Pointing to a stone with his torch beam, Mick asserts:

This one over here. People say to me, 'Mick – it doesn't look like anything at all'. But when I look at it I seem to see a pair of hands clutching at a slippery wet rope. Sliding down, down into the dark water. Sometimes I stand here for hours just looking at it. (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2003: 134)

As the sketch rolls out Mick offers more insight about the story and finally provides the resolution:

Michael Buerk did say to me, 'Mick you can't go on blaming yourself, it wasn't your fault.' But I don't know. Young kiddie like that. Whole life ahead of him. 'School Trip Tragedy: Local Man Blamed.' Every day the same. Parade of blank faces. The constant drip-drip from the cavern roof.

The cold indifference of the ancient rock. But you keep going, don't you?
(Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2003: 134)

Sandwiched between different sketches, the cave sketch fills the time gap between different events. For instance, by being in between the scene of Barbara and Benjamin's phone conversation and the scene where Barbara picks Benjamin up with her cab, the cave guide sketch makes these two events chronologically possible. The sketch is linked to the rest of the sketches in this episode via the pram gag, which connects the events set in the town to the caves.

7.5 Continuous & One-off Gags

Similar to the pram gag, there are various continuous and one-off gags throughout the show. These generally revolve around supporting characters that do not appear in other strands. While the pram gag occurs only within series one episode five, some continue through several episodes such as the portaloo gag that spans two episodes. In series two episode one, we see a large woman outside a portaloo pulling on the handle impatiently. Suddenly the door handle breaks the door bursts open. Water floods on to the street along with a drowned man. As the man lies at the woman's feet facing the floor with his pants down, she just jumps over him, steps in to the loo and closes the door. Seventeen minutes into the episode in another exterior shot the camera follows a young man in school uniform. As he passes by the portaloo, we see that there are now two drowned people lying on the ground on top of each other, the large woman and the original drowned man. The gag continues in the next episode linked to Herr Lipp's coach trip discussed in 5.4.2. As the school bus travels through the High Street and passes the portaloo, we see four people lying on the floor on top of each other.

This continuous gag takes place in between main sketch strands and helps develop the chronological order of the events. It also fills in the 'gaps' between the main sketches. The young man passing by the portaloo is actually walking to the butcher, where the next 'special stuff' sketch takes place. Such gags seem, then, to fill every scene with a joke and give them a comedy purpose apart from their apparent narra-

tive function. This is linked to a rule the production team applied, which was not to film an exterior shot unless something was in it (Rodgers Interview 2012).

There may also be a pleasure of recognition for those who remember this gag from the previous episode. However, the joke works even if one does not realise that this is a continuous gag. Seeing people lying on the street on top of each other outside a portaloo while everybody else seems to be going on with their business is funny. Small gags like these happen in the background and reflect the extraordinary nature of Royston Vasey. This takes us back to the costume designer Yves Barre's remarks on the significance of the background and the supporting artists in revealing the essence of the fictional town (see *chapter six*).

Other interesting gags are the flyers that appear in almost every episode. For instance, throughout the series we can spot various 'lost' flyers posted on the high street such as lost finger, lost spine, lost class, and lost zoo. These are bits that can be spotted while the camera follows an action. One flyer (series one episode two) with a picture of an elderly woman reads, "Lost Grandma Bradley. Answers to the name of 'Nana'. Please ring: 01484 459329" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2003: 47). Later in the episode we can spot Nana hanging from the church rooftop. However, the joke neither evolves nor progresses any of the plot lines. Such gags tend to be seen as details that form the fabric of the show. By including many gags, details and intertextual references, the series seems to demand attention. This creates what Plowman (Interview 2012) calls the illusion of seriality where the audience is encouraged to spot these details and remember them, although most of the time they do not matter in terms of the narrative development. This links to the discussions on the postmodern drama and its relationship with its audiences (Collins 1992; Page 2001). Arguably, the series encourages people to spot 'clues' (gags, references and details) spread across the episodes, and read into the narrative, the location and the characters through them.

7.6   Christmas Special

The previous sections examined the narrative structure of the first two seasons. This section focuses on the Christmas Special that marks the beginning of the changes in the TV series. It illustrates why these changes happened and what the implications

were on the characters and the style of storytelling in season three. The section reveals that the changes were based on artistic inspirations rather than organisational concerns.

The Christmas Special was filmed in the summer of 2000 and broadcast after season two. Created in a different style and format from the series, the Christmas Special comes across as a homage to the Amicus portmanteau films that the creators are fond of. Amicus House of Horror created films in two formats, the single-plot and portmanteau/anthology. It is the latter in which the company's distinctiveness resides (see Rigby 2005; Hutchings 2002). Portmanteau films were not exclusive to Amicus. However, the British/American company provided unique and popular productions (Pirie 2008).

Portmanteau films offer three or four mini dramas linked by a common theme or a connecting story instead of a single full-length narrative (see *chapter there*). These mini narratives showcase a selection of horror themes such as vampires, werewolves, and voodoo along with tales of crime and revenge (Hutchings 2002). *The League* writers explain that this mixture of various themes was what they had in mind when they were compiling stories for the Christmas Special, to have various supernatural stories and end it with the most 'realistic' and frightening one (Rigby 2005).

The League's Christmas Special comprises three short stories: a voodoo tale revolving around Charlie and Stella (a couple with a problematic marriage) set in the present day Royston Vasey, a vampire-flavoured tale set in 1970's Duisberg, Germany with the stereotypical gay character Herr Lipp, and a story set in Royston Vasey in 1895 about Dr. Chinnery's great-grandfather, also a vet, who is cursed to kill every animal he tries to treat. His descendants inherit this curse. The linking device between these stories is the church where the characters from three stories respectively arrive on Christmas Eve to talk about their troubles with the vicar, Bernice. This linking device also offers a story that revolves around Bernice and Papa Lazarou, which ends the programme. We learn that when Bernice was a young girl her mother was kidnapped by someone dressed as Santa Claus on Christmas Eve. This particular evening, he comes back to kidnap Bernice. This shadowy character turns out to be Papa Lazarou. Although the special does not progress any of the larger narrative arcs, it does offer more information about the characters and the location. For ex-

ample, we learn why Bernice is a cynical and bitter person and why Dr. Chinnery kills all his patients.

Pemberton (Interview 2012) explains that apart from their love for portmanteau films and the desire to make one, another reason behind the format of the Christmas Special was to be able to stick with the characters longer and tell fully rounded stories. The Christmas Special was about fifty-six minutes long, which meant that each story, based on one or a set of characters, lasted between ten to fifteen minutes. Pemberton adds, "We loved it so much and we loved the way it turned out. We loved spending that extra time not thinking each one had to be a three minute thing" (Interview 2012). Jemma Rodgers, the producer, supports the writer's remarks, "I think we all felt that the characters were so well defined they needed longer to live" (Interview 2012). Rodgers notes that this format allowed them "to see that you could actually tell really interesting stories with these characters" (Interview 2012). In terms of the executive producer Jon Plowman's editorial involvement in the course of the Christmas Special, Rodgers explains, "... his only note was, 'Is that really what you want to make? Really?' and I'm going, 'Yes!' and that was it. Literally it" (Interview 2012).

7.7   Season Three

In terms of storytelling, season three is completely transformed, from sketch show to serial. This section explores the decision making process that lead to the change in format, both from the creative side (the writers and the producer) and the institutional side (the executive producer and the commissioners). It finds that developing a serial form was an artistic decision. The commissioners accepted the idea because it satisfied their commissioning practices: a) brought something new yet familiar, and b) had the potential to justify the licence fee and the money spent on the production. The analysis also reveals that the group had a distinct freedom in this decision making process.

As the series progressed both the writers and the producer were leaning towards a longer narrative form (Rodgers Interview 2012). The producer's aspirations in drama production, and the writers' interest in horror and drama genres (in terms of writing), as well as larger performance pieces (due the fact that three of them were

trained actors and played almost all the parts in the series) intensified. In fact, after *The League* Rodgers moved on to producing drama series, and television movies – including the crime drama *Murphy's Law* (BBC, 2003–2007) and the TV film *Wedding Belles* (Channel 4, 2007). The writers developed serials such as *Funland* (BBC, 2005), and *Psychoville* (BBC, 2009–2011), as well as series with serial elements such as *Sherlock* (BBC, 2010-). Pemberton notes, "... we got more interested in [...] going deeper and deeper with the characters the more it [*The League*] went on. And that's just being braver as a writer I suppose, growing out of a sketch format and into something a bit richer" (Interview 2012). Pemberton explains that the success of the Christmas Special encouraged them to develop this new approach. What they were after was, "like with the Christmas Special, raising some of the characters who've been on the fringes of the show, raising them up and letting them have more of a story" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005i).

Similarly, Pemberton points out that their ambition to develop themselves as writers and performers was linked to their desire to do something different, "... we felt that it was time to make a change and not repeat what we've already done. [...] We'd always pushed ourselves creatively and we felt we had to do something to move the show on" (Interview 2012). This links back to the discussions on the third season syndrome and commissioning practices at the BBC – providing something new yet familiar (see *chapter five*). *The League's* third season seems to satisfy the artistic and administrative necessities. The first two seasons as well as the Christmas special had good ratings – the highest ratings were 3.1 million with season two episode one (Rodgers interview 2012). The series' ratings varied between 2 and 2.6 million all the way through (Rodgers Interview 2012). This was deemed satisfactory for BBC 2 (Plowman Interview 2012). In terms of the artistic decisions, while series three had some similarities with previous seasons – it was still based on Royston Vasey and its inhabitants – it had major differences in terms of storytelling.

The third season followed the stories of some well known, some less known and some new characters. It embodied a serial form where each episode's plotlines (one main plot and two smaller plots) were about a small group of characters and the series was linked by a common device, which appeared in each episode. This was a red plastic bag that connected all the events and provided a time line. Each episode ended with a car crash, and by the end of the season all the main plotlines were

connected to this incident. Each episode showed the events leading up to the car crash from a different group of characters' point of view. The title sequence as well as the laughter track that were used in season one and two were abandoned. Although studio filming still took place (as with the Christmas Special) it was not done in front of an audience. These elements (filming in front of an audience, laughter track and the title sequences) reflected the previous comedy sketch format, and did not suit the third season's new style (Rodgers Interview 2012). Shearmith notes that there are less "jokes" in this season (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005g), which comes from abandoning gag-based narrative structure, laughter-track and non-developmental parts like the title sequences (see Hunt 2008: 108–109). However, the third season still includes small gags and one-off characters that carried the sketch show essence of the first two seasons. The key difference is that the show structure is not build on these non-developmental aspects as it was in the first two seasons
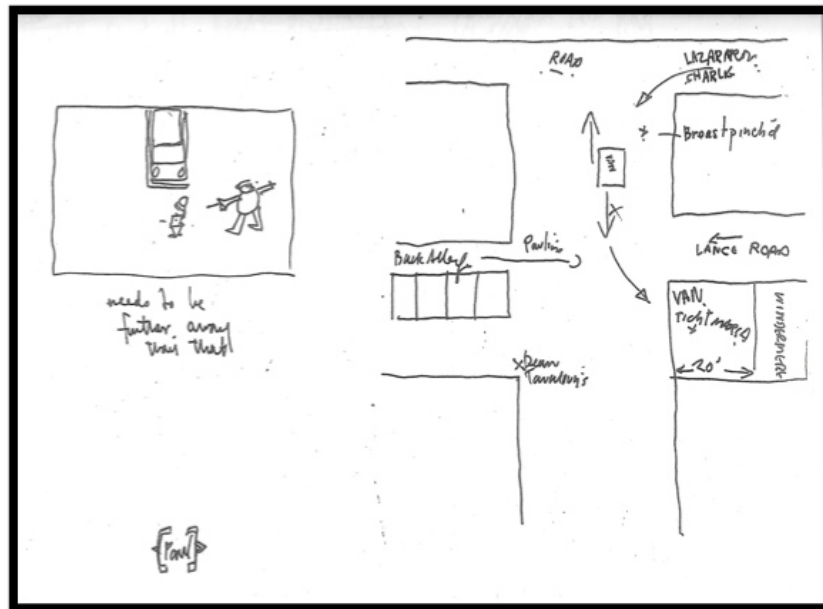
Figure 14: A sketch for the series three ending by the director Steve Bendelack (provided by Mike Nicholson).

From a commissioning perspective Plowman suggests that the change towards a serial form can be interpreted as "taking the audiences by the hand" in that "... it told the audience, 'OK! Don't worry this episode is mostly about this character and we are going to try and tell you a lot about this character in this episode rather than

cut this character into six bits...''' (Interview 2012). However, Plowman highlights that the change towards a serial form was not made at the request of the commissioners but by the writers, and that 'helping the audience' was not the writers' intention. Their decisions were purely artistic and led by their own ambitions rather than a concern to make the show 'less demanding' for the audience. Still, although for different reasons, both the commissioners and the writers agreed on the format change. Rodgers argues that, as the core creative team, they did not need to ask anyone's permission to make the changes (Interview 2012). The producer explains that, similarly to the Christmas Special, the executive producer had minimal editorial involvement in the format changes in season three, "The only thing Jon [Plowman] ever saw of it was literally when it went out. He never came into the edit, unless we had something really genuinely very controversial" (Interview 2012). The decision was also embraced by the other creative staff, such as the costume designer and the director who appreciated a new challenge (see Barre and Plowman Interviews 2012).

Narrative twists came to the forefront of the new season's narrative construction. For instance, the writers kill their most famous characters Tubbs and Edwards (the local shop owners) within the first two minutes; Charlie (a straight married male character) changes his sexual preferences, the transsexual cab driver Barbara gives birth and Keith, one of the new characters, turns out to be Papa Lazarou. Pemberton explains that one of their primary aspiration was, "not wanting people to be able to predict what was going to happen" (Interview 2012).

Having clearer storylines in each episode and focusing on a smaller group of characters might make it easier for the audience to follow the show. However, it is still packed with details and references, which, as discussed previously, form part of the show's demanding nature. This time perhaps the details are even more important as they start to add to the larger narrative rather than creating an 'illusion' of a narrative arc. Here, the stories are tightly connected. Each episode offers three plotlines, which are part of a larger narrative and in the end sequence all the main plotlines come together.

The storyboard artist Mike Nicholson who came on board in the third season explains that the reason why he got hired was to help visually sketch out the complex narrative structure and particularly the complicated end sequence. While writing the script the writers made sketches in order to plot the events (see Dyson, Gatiss

et al. 2003). After reading the scripts the director Steve Bendelack started making storyboards, mapping out the events and exploring what should be in each frame in order to construct a coherent timeline and visual narrative development (Nicholson Interview 2012). Nicholson points out that although Bendelack's illustrations were artistic and would be satisfactory in most productions, *The League*'s situation was extraordinary due to the complexity of the narrative; thus they needed a professional storyboard artist. What was seen in each frame was very important as it reflected events happening simultaneously, in the same place from different points of view. Therefore, Nicholson drew the storyboards for the complicated sequences frame by frame, and helped form a clearer visual narrative structure for the third season.
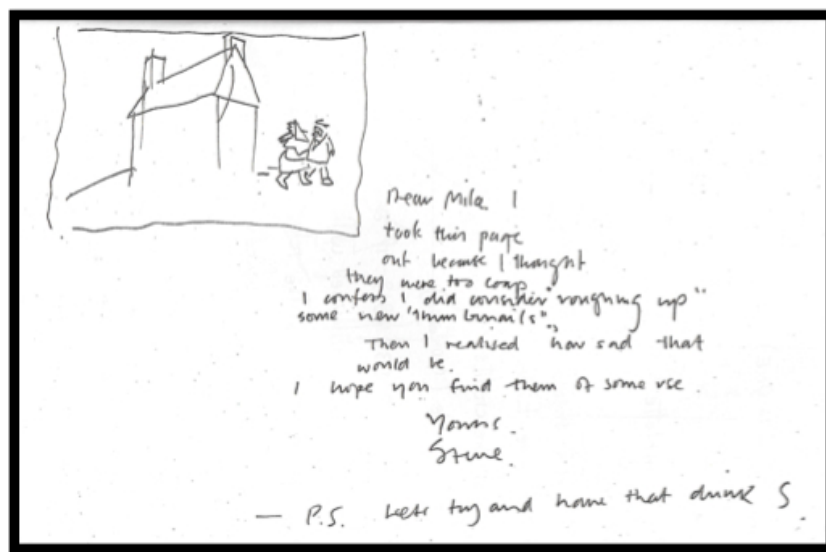
Figure 15: Steve Bendelack storyboard with a note for Mike Nicholson (provided by Nicholson).

The new format proved to be controversial and got some mixed reactions. As Pemberton notes, "We were taken aback really by how much certain people hated it but then for those who hated [it] there are all those who think it's the best. ... so you can't please everyone all the time..." (Interview 2012).[1]

Pemberton adds, "And sometimes we over complicated things maybe. But ... I don't think we changed..." (Interview 2012). The writers observe an important im-

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[1]See Hunt (2008, 105–8) for the summary of the reviews. Hunt charts the negative reviews yet points out the high DVD sales for season three and the positive user ratings.
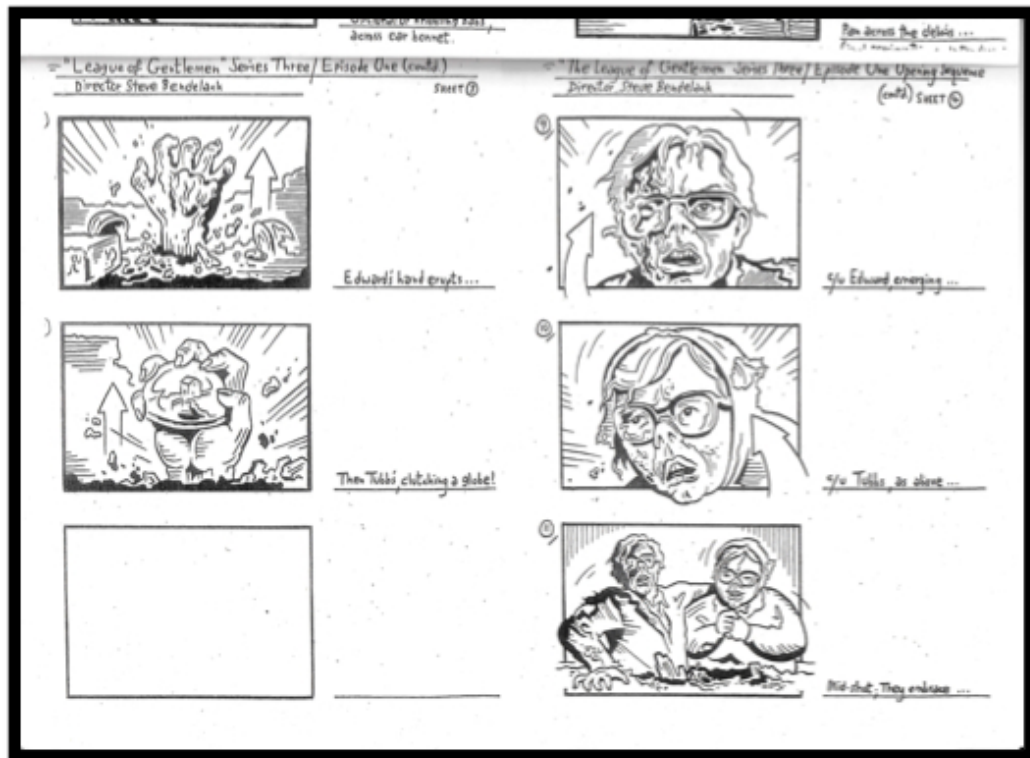
Figure 16: Mike Nicholson storyboard (provided by Nicholson).

plication of the narrative construction in season three, which is that if you do not like a character in a certain episode, you are stuck with them that week, "whereas one of the joys about the form [in season one and two] is that if you don't like a character it doesn't matter because you only have to stick with them for a couple of minutes and the one you do like will come on again..." (Dyson cited in Hunt 2008: 108). However, the writers hoped that if people watched the first two seasons, they would be interested in these characters' stories (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005g). Another issue with the third season is that one only understands that all the events taking place are linked together at the end of the second episode. This means that watching the series takes a bit of dedication and getting used to the new format (see Pemberton Interview 2012).

This analysis of the development of series three revealed that the change in the format was an artistic decision made by the writers and the producer Jemma Rodgers. The decision was supported by the commissioners for two reasons. Firstly, the suc-

cess of the Christmas Special, which had a longer narrative form, showed the potential of the serial form to bring back audiences. Secondly, the third season was providing new stories about the established characters from the previous season, thus providing something new and familiar. For the writers and the producers the audience reactions were not part of the decision making process. However, they do hope that the audiences appreciate the risk that they took by changing the format and the hard work that was put into making the third season (Rodgers Interview 2012).

7.8   Conclusion

With a focus on the narrative construction of the show, this chapter offered insights into the development of *The League – research question one –* the workings of the BBC (organisational strategies and professional roles) *– research question two –* and how breakthroughs came about in the 1990s BBC broadcasting environment *– research question three.*

The chapter revealed the collaborative nature of TV production. *The League*'s narrative construction is one of its unique aspects that made the show stand out from the crowd. The analysis shows that the writers' and Sarah Smith's, the first producer of *The League*, input were crucial to the formation of this unique feature. The writers came up with the core idea of having two-part sketches that had a sense of narrative and character development. Smith took this core idea and added to it by a) coming up with the idea to set all the sketches in one place, and b) forming larger narrative arcs that bring a sense of continuity to the series. Two-part sketches, narrative arcs, location, episode structures (the order of the sketches), attention to detail as well as filling every scene with small gags and intertextual references together created the 'illusion of seriality' in the first two seasons and helped *The League* go beyond the traditional sketch format. The analysis reveals that the storyboard artist Mike Nicholson influenced the storytelling style of the show by helping to transfer the third season's complex narrative structure to the screens.

The analysis points to a change in the format of the show beginning with the Christmas Special. While the Christmas Special was born out of the writers' love for portmanteau horror films, series three with its serial nature came from the writ-

ers as well as the second producer Jemma Rodgers' aspirations for longer narrative forms. The interesting point here is that the production team did not experience any resistance from the senior commissioning executives. Compared to the experiences of various writers and producers and the analysis of various researchers on the workings of the BBC in the 1990s, which was examined in *chapter four,* the League writers and producers enjoyed unusual creative freedom, specifically in relation to their decision on the format and the narrative structure of the show. This was due to two factors: a) the changes the production team wanted to make for artistic reasons aligned with the commissioning requirements (potential to justify the licence fee), and b) the show was supported by the executive producer.

Another interesting outcome of the analysis is that audiences were not considered when deciding to change the format. The writers enjoyed creative freedom, at a time when, as suggested by various researchers and media professionals (see Gray 1995; Day-Lewis 1998; Born 2004) (*chapter four*), risk taking was kept to minimum and market research was the order of the day. The creative freedom that the writers enjoyed was the result of support they received from the creative managers and the commissioning executives.

The analysis also illustrates that the narrative complexities of the series support the discussions in *chapter five* and *six* on location and the characters, which indicated that the show presents something familiar yet also extra-ordinary. The narrative complexities, then, help *The League* move away from cliché representations and present a unique and specific world with its own rules.

8

ECOLOGY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN

This chapter focuses on the production ecology of *The League of Gentlemen* and the BBC, and demonstrates how macro, meso and micro elements impinge on the production process. As explained in *chapter one*, production ecology is the system in which television programmes are created. This system works through complex interactions from all three layers of analysis (Cottle 2003; Cottle 2004; Mittell 2004) where "each part of the whole both affects, and is affected by, the other parts" (Alvarado and Buscombe 1978: 4). This chapter illustrates the relations and struggles between macro, meso and micro factors (see Bourdieu 1993; Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod et al. 2002; Cottle 2004; Hesmondhalgh 2006; Grenfell 2008; Steemers 2010), how they influence each other and what the implications of the interactions are in terms of creativity and the final output (e.g. visual outcome).

The analysis starts with an examination of the wider context, which is then followed by an examination of the middle ground and the shop floor of BBC television production and specifically the creation of *The League*. The levels of analysis are charted as:

- The macro level: 'Producer Choice', 'Bi-Media', BBC 2 channel tone and strategies, and Yorkshire TV Studio's strategies, in relation to the economic and organisational context.

- The meso level: the executive roles, editorial interference and the creative managers' (particularly the producer and the executive producer) decisions and practices – how they work through the organisational cultures, corporate strategies and editorial policies.

- The micro level: daily practices of primary and secondary creative staff, production atmosphere, working relationships, as well as the coincidences and the decisions that were made at the moment of production and filming.[1]

In this chapter, while research question two becomes the main focus, insights into all three research questions are provided:

Q1 How did the creation process of *The League of Gentlemen* develop?

Q2 How does the television production ecology work within the BBC with particular reference to *The League of Gentlemen* as a case study?

Q3 How did the "special moments" in television, such as *The League of Gentlemen*, emerge in the BBC during the 1990s, a decade that is considered to be "infertile" by some researchers (e.g. Born 2004)?

Examining micro instances from the creation process of the show will shed light on *research question one*. The examination of interactions between micro, meso and macro levels will help illuminate *research question two*. The discussions on collaboration, creative freedom, individual perspectives, risk taking, meeting of artistic and organisational aims, channel tone and tradition, the producer's role as well as executive support will help us understand how 'special moments' in television, in other words breakthroughs, emerged within the broadcasting environment of the 1990s and the beginning of noughties – *research question three*. The analysis points to the specificity of each production, yet also helps illuminate some of the larger workings of TV production (Elliott 1972; Mittell 2004).

8.1   The Organisational Context

Analysing a specific period in the history of the BBC (end of the nineties and the beginning of the noughties), this section examines the Corporation's organisational structure and strategies, and "how the BBC felt about itself" (Stuart Murphy Interview 2012) during this period. It reflects on the influence of these aspects on the commissioning and development of *The League* - the commissioning deal with the

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[1]For occupational categories in media industries see Ryan (1992) and Hesmondhalgh (2007) – *chapter four*.

BBC, its transformation from radio to television, and various stages in the creation of the television show.

The discussion focuses on these issues: the 'Bi-media' scheme of the nineties and its influence on commissioning and production practices with a focus on *The League*; the development of the independent sector and its influence on the production environment; the difference between the BBC in-house productions and the BBC funded indie productions; BBC2 strategies; editorial censorship; executive level roles (channel controller, head of comedy and comedy commissioner); and individual professional attitudes of various executives. The analysis provides answers to these questions:

> What makes *The League* a BBC 2 in-house production?
>
> Was this a period of crisis for BBC comedy production? Why?

8.1.1 *'Producer Choice': 'Bi-Media', 'BBC Production' & 'BBC Broadcast'*

As discussed in *chapter four*, with 'Producer Choice' a new way of working was introduced to the BBC. This was the start of a new organisational structure, new mechanisms of commissioning programmes, a new way of brokering deals, new mission statements and new editorial guidelines (Felix 2000; Kung-Shankleman 2000; Born 2002; Born 2004; Hendy 2007: 285). The new organisational structure meant that the "distinction between 'Radio' and 'Television' was now less important than the one between 'purchaser' and 'provider'" (Hendy 2007: 289). By 1996, the BBC saw a complete separation of production and commissioning, and the merging of BBC Radio and BBC Television. For example, Hendy (2007) explains that controllers of BBC 1, BBC 2 and the four radio networks were all gathered under 'BBC Broadcast' – the purchasing side of the corporation, while the producers from both television and radio were gathered under 'BBC Production' – the supply side of the corporation. Within 'BBC Productions' the producers were assigned to one of the eighteen bi-media units such as 'BBC Entertainment'. This led to the sharing of staff, office space (e.g. moving Radio News and Current Affairs to TV Centre in White City), talent and raw programme material. The motivation behind the new structure was to make programmes more efficiently, share ideas, reduce the duplication of effort,

and develop tighter editorial control (McNair 2003: 110–111; Franklin, Hamer et al. 2005: 26; Hendy 2007: 288–290, 365).

This merger had specific implications in the context of comedy and entertainment. In the history of BBC comedy production there is a long line of BBC radio shows transferring to BBC television (*chapter five*). There are also some incidents where BBC Television turned down the chance to adapt its radio output such as *After Henry* (BBC Radio 4, 1985–8), *Up the Garden Path* (BBC Radio 4, 1987–1993) and *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* (BBC Radio 4, 1988), which found a place on commercial channels (Hendy 2007). The TV incarnations of these shows proved to be quite successful (Hendy 2007). It seems that along with cost-efficiency and tighter editorial control, the loss of valuable Radio 4 output that could possibility bring high TV ratings was an important motivation for developing a "tighter linkage between the two parts of the Corporation" (Michael Green cited in Hendy 2007: 376), which led to the introduction of 'Bi-media'. Jon Plowman thinks that "'Bi-Media' is just one of those phrases which the Director General picked up, like 'Producer Choice' ... [which] doesn't mean anything in the real world" (Interview 2012). For Plowman this new scheme was not actually anything new as transfer between radio and television was a long running phenomenon within the BBC (Interview 2012).

From the mid-1990s onwards new deals under 'Bi-media' started to be made. *The League of Gentlemen* was one of the first programmes that was signed under this scheme (see Hendy 2007: 376). By the end of the nineties the independent production sector was rapidly growing (Lumsden Interview 2011) (see *chapter four*). This, Plowman (Interview 2012) suggests, was an important factor behind their "relatively unusual deal" with the League. In order to avoid losing the group to independent companies, the offer was to pay the group more than they would normally get paid for doing radio on the understanding that the BBC would do their television series too (Plowman Interview 2012). BBC producer Sarah Smith was not the only person who approached the League. Gatiss explains that once they started getting good reviews at the 1997 Edinburgh Fringe Festival they had a few offers to put the show on TV, yet none of them were very satisfying. Gatiss describes the other offers thus: "It was all, 'Well, in order to get it on TV you have to do this, this and this. You have to have two girls, you need to have songs, the sketches can't be more than a minute long" (cited in Keighron 2003: 21).

Although 'Bi-media' may not be something completely new, the changes in the or-
ganisational system were. The system, according to the critics favoured television
and left radio "subordinated to the demands of the larger medium" (Robins 1999;
Hendy 2007: 288) as well as creating a negative atmosphere among the radio staff.
Stuart Murphy (Interview 2011) suggests that this new system, which expected the
comedy producers to do both radio and TV versions of a show, and recognised them
as "curators of brands" did not work in reality. For Murphy, radio producers want
to be in radio because they are attracted to the oral medium while the TV people
want to be in TV because they are interested in the visual elements. However, *The
League*'s producer Sarah Smith's -who worked on the radio and the television incar-
nation – personal attitude reveals a different perspective. Lucy Lumsden (Interview
2011) gives other examples, comedy writer and producer Harry Thompson, and light
entertainment producer Jon Magnusson who both started off in radio and moved to
television. Sarah Smith became a director and moved on to the big screen. This
suggests that while there was a general discomfort and dislike towards the new sys-
tem, some radio producers with visual ambitions seem to have benefitted from it. It
also suggests that this transition period was not entirely a period of crisis as various
successful radio and TV transfer programmes were produced (e.g. *The League of
Gentlemen*, *Goodness Gracious Me*, *Dead Ringers*, and *Little Britain*). Secondly, it
shows that some radio producers did make use of the new system to nurture their
professional ambitions. This, however, seems to have taken place at an individual
level and does not reflect wider sentiments among BBC staff.

According to Paul Jackson (comedy producer and former Controller of En-
tertainment responsible for TV, radio and online output) and Mark Gatiss
(writer/performer) *The League* benefited from 'Bi-media' commissioning (Dyson,
Gatiss et al. 2005i). Gatiss explains, "There was always this gap... there would be a
successful radio series on BBC and then about three years later they would lose it to
ITV". He adds that for *The League* the commissioning process was very quick: "by
the time it got [to] getting a TV pilot, so called, there was no sort of big phone call
saying, 'We got the telly show'. It was kind of a gradual thing" (Dyson, Gatiss et al.
2005i). However, the writers were not aware at the time that this transition would put
a strain on their relationship with Radio 4. As explained in *chapter five*, although
the League got the commissioning for the TV series and started working on produc-

tion very quickly, they had to take a long break after shooting the pilot as money was very tight. During this break the League approached Radio 4 to make a second radio series, and received a reaction they had not expected. BBC Radio seems to have felt that the writers were using radio as a testing ground for their new TV show (Plowman and Pemberton Interviews 2012). They asked the group to go though a formal commissioning process for a new radio series, which the writers felt was unnecessary. Because of this situation the writers stopped pursuing a second radio series. These events reveal that although 'Bi-media' seemed to create a quick transfer to television, it also created a strain between BBC Radio and BBC Television, which led to the League having to abandon their possible second radio series. On the other hand, although the group's transition was quick, it was not particularly smooth. The low budget that was offered to the group, considering the high production value the production team was aiming for, created tensions during pre-production (see *chapter five*).

8.1.2 *The Commissioning Process in the BBC*

Stuart Murphy (former Controller of BBC Choice & BBC 3) explains that every week each Channel Controller together with his/her team meets with the Genre Commissioning Controllers and their teams. The discussions in these meetings feed into the final commissioning meeting. Murphy describes "the final moment of commissioning" as "a bit like the UN" (Interview 2011).

Murphy (Interview 2011) explains that the Channel Controller, who looks after a specific channel, sits with their schedulers and finance staff. Genre Commissioning Controller, for example the Controller of Comedy Commissioning for Television (who is responsible for the commissioning of all comedy programmes, in-house and independent, for BBC channels) sits together with two or three other commissioners, the genre's slate management team (dealing with budgets, quotas and targets) and the Controller of Business (who is responsible for the business operations and all the key business functions within a specific genre for BBC in-house and independent productions) (see BBC 2014b; BBC 2014c). On the other side, there is the Head of Development for Television Productions, which is part of the BBC's in-house production department. Lastly, there are four or five independent sector representatives. Mur-
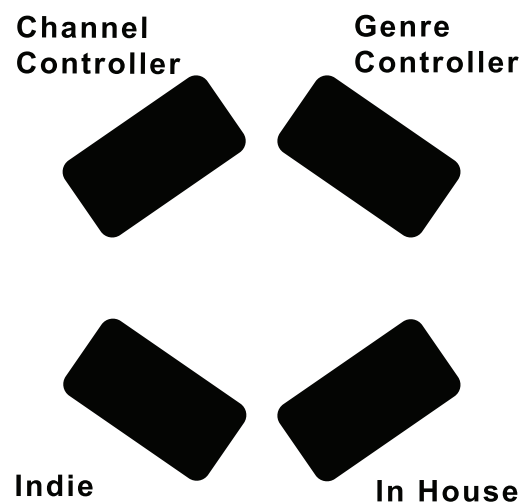
Figure 1: A representation of Stuart Murphy's drawing of the final commissioning
stage at the BBC.

phy reflects on his experiences in such meetings: "...the finance people, you hope,
would sit in the background but often they'd chip in with what they thought was
creatively right. One of the problems with the BBC..." (Interview 2011). Murphy
explains:

> Sometimes you'd get a finance person saying, 'Well that doesn't quite fit
> into the strategy'. You think, 'Well yeah. You have a strategy, which is
> a guideline and a rough. It's a rough no man's land territory. It's not a
> pure, discrete thing'. So if it's funny and it doesn't fit the strategy, fuck
> the strategy. If it's funny you commission it. (Interview 2011)

Lucy Lumsden (Interview 2011) (Former BBC Controller of Comedy Commission-
ing) adds that such professional reactions, centering decisions on a mission statement
or seeing it as a guideline, have to do with one's personal approach. In terms of the
BBC's organisational structure, Plowman (Interview 2012) argues that within the
Corporation, employees "who make programs are [a] tiny minority" and explains:

> Most people who work at the BBC don't make programmes and certainly
> work on things that don't have a script. So when confronted with shows
> that are weird or take a bit of watching, they can be known [to] either

go, 'Wow! This is extraordinary!' or they sort of worry about them and don't know quite where to put them or what to do with them. (Interview 2012)

For example, the changes in the broadcast time and day of the *Monty Python's Flying Circus,* through its lifespan, is a good example for how programmers or executives may have issues with the scheduling of an unorthodox show (Wilmut 1982; Playback 1995) (see *chapter four*).

Plowman expresses his perspective on comedy commissioning decisions, noting that innovation is "vital":

I've always said that the only scripts worth making are the ones when you read and think, 'I have no idea what this is about'. Because so many things, so many bits of comedy, and hopefully not many of them, [that] make their way out to telly [...] feel like imitations [of] sitcoms. They feel like they watched telly and thought, 'That's what sit-com is. I better write that'. And so, things, which don't do that are the ones you want to do. I don't know what this person is on but I want some. And that was always true with the League guys. (Interview 2012)

Plowman (Interview 2012) argues that *The League* was very suitable for BBC 2, in terms of the channel tone and strategy. BBC 2 is known for providing ground- breaking shows such as *Fawlty Towers* (BBC, 1975–79), *The Young Ones* (BBC, 1982–84), and *The Royle Family* (BBC, 1998–2012) (BBC 2014a). *The League* was a successor for such critically acclaimed shows. Plowman (Interview 2012) explains that unlike BBC 1, BBC 2 in general does not "feel like home" for many viewers, and compared to BBC 1 it does not achieve very high ratings. For example, Plowman notes that when they broadcast the *Ab Fab Christmas Special* in 2012 on BBC 1 they got 7 million viewers, and thinks that if they broadcast the same programme at the same time but on BBC 2 they would probably get around 2.5 million. For Plowman the important point for commissioning for BBC 2 is to commission work that will bring prestige to the channel and win awards rather than high ratings. Plowman explains:

Television is a great big monster that eats stuff. Every night it eats [...] let's say in prime time it eats [...] 3 hours a night of hugely expensive stuff. So [...] one channel eats 21 hours a week of stuff, 21 [one] hours,

42 half hours. [...] So what controllers want most is stuff that [...] stands out and brings credit to their channel. (Interview 2012)

Plowman notes that another important aspect is the audience age and being able to cater for that viewer category:

The average age for the audience for BBC 2 for most shows [was] 53, let's say. By doing *League of Gentlemen*, and *Reeves and Mortimer* and *Human Remains* and *Royle Family* [...] by doing stuff that's a bit out there you bring that age down. You lose some of them, some of the older ones go, as it were, but you are bringing down the average age of your channel. And you have to. The equation at the BBC is everybody pays their licence fee so everybody should get something off it. (Interview 2012)

Comedy programmes such as *The League* are important to BBC 2, then, as they reduce the average audience age, help the BBC to fulfil its mission and justify its licence fee. Although the shows are not expected to bring high ratings, as discussed in *chapter five*, they still need to reach enough audiences to justify the money spent on them. *The League* also brought prestige to the channel and stood out from the crowd (see 4.3 for the awards they received).

As discussed in *chapter five* and *six*, *The League* carries a distinct tone that is associated with BBC 2 (e.g. obtuse characters and demanding style), and embodies a particularly British essence (e.g. British socio-political history, gothic, absurdity, drag, and comedy of embarrassment and social discomfort). This was perhaps one of the reasons why the show became a cult phenomenon in the UK (see BFI classics collection) developing a dedicated fan base who followed the League throughout their journey (stage, radio, television, and film) and bought their merchandise (DVDs, books, snow globes, etc.). For example, these fans visited Hadfield, the filming location, during the period that the show was broadcast and the following few years. Aware of the high level of interest, as a member of *The League* fan club Ken Cross (Interview 2012) used to organise regular trips to Hadfield for the fans. Derbyshire Heritage Centre was, too, offering guided tours around the village. As the Centre's spokesman Richard Felix stated in 2004, "I know the show has a big cult following and the trips are receiving a lot of interest from fans" (Bates 2007: 1).

On the other hand, this mix of tone and style made it difficult to sell the programme abroad. Jemma Rodgers (Interview 2012), the producer, remembers a frustrating phone call she had during the production of season two with a representative from Comedy Central (USA) where she tried to explain what the show is about, who and what Papa Lazarou is and why it is funny. Rodgers (Interview 2012) explains, "[t]he Comedy Central people just didn't get it at all". It seems as if the themes the show was dealing with and the tone it carried did not resonate with the American comedy channel and they assumed that its audiences would not get it either. Yet, it is important to note that the League members were inspired by certain American hits from film, television and literature. For example, in terms of characters and writing tone *The League* echoes the 1960s highly controversial novel *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (Hubert Shelby Jr., 1964), which portrays taboo subjects and tells the stories of grotesque characters in a graphic fashion (Pemberton Interview 2012). Similarly, in terms of the creation of location, *The League* writers were inspired from the American serial drama *Twin Peaks* (1990-1), which introduces the audiences to a group of odd characters living in a strange rural town (Pemberton Interview 2012). As the international misfortunes of *The League* reveal these pop-culture references were not enough for Comedy Central to pick up the show. *The League*'s only international appearance was in Australia on ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation), one of the close connections of BBC Wordlwide, the main commercial arm of the BBC (see BBC Worldwide 2015).
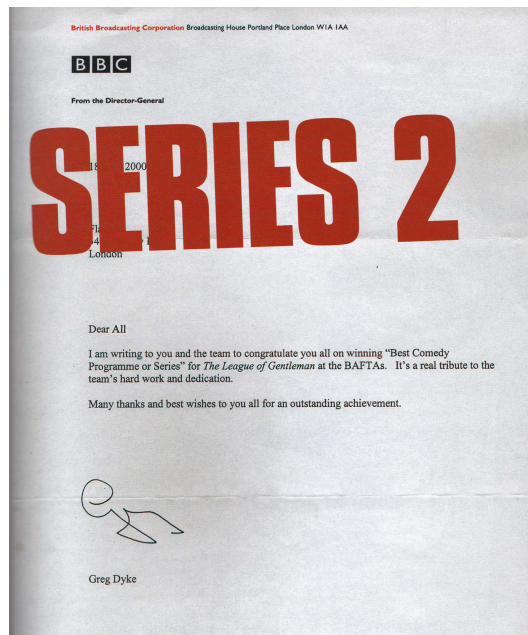
Figure 2: Greg Dyke, Director General, Letter (*The League of Gentlemen Scripts and That*: 167)
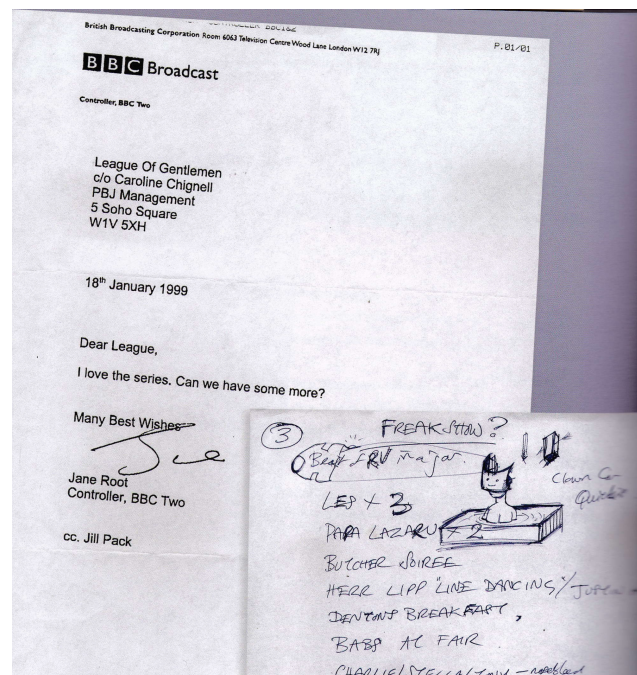
Figure 3: Jane Root, Controller of BBC 2, Letter (*The League of Gentlemen Scripts and That*: 230)

8.1.3   *The League of Gentlemen: A BBC In-house Production*

8.1.3 will explore the production differences between the BBC and commercial chan-
nels (e.g. Channel 4), as well as BBC in-house and BBC indie productions in terms
of budgets, editorial censorship, marketing, and target audience. The key questions
that the section focuses on are:

- What makes *The League* a BBC in-house production for BBC 2?

- What makes its production process stand out?

According to Jemma Rodgers there are two factors that are key for *The League*,
"One, it was very lucky to be BBC in-house at the time; and two, Jon Plowman was
our exec" (Interview 2012). Rodgers explains that the fact it was an in-house pro-
duction meant that budget wise they were freer than indie productions: "the budgets
were...tight but they weren't as tight as they would be if the money was out of the
building" (Interview 2012). She also notes that Plowman as their executive producer
was able to provide a breathing space moneywise. For example, at times Plowman
would move money around various productions to cover their overspend (Interview
2012). Plowman (Interview 2012) explains that although *The League* did go over
budget in every season it was never catastrophic.

In terms of the editorial decisions, Rodgers explains that they had the trust of their
executives, "We were quite a closed down team. We didn't show our ways to anyone.
Nobody looked at our rushes; nobody asked to see them and I genuinely don't think
it would have been what it was if they had" (Interview 2012). Rodgers remembers
few incidents when Plowman and Paul Jackson (former Controller of Entertainment)
visited during filming. For example, in season three Plowman was on set when they
were filming the masturbation scene, where Charlie (played by Pemberton) pretends
to be a female masseuse and gives "special treatment" to the customers. Although
the executive producer thought this was a controversial scene Rodgers notes that
Plowman "was incredibly supportive" (Interview 2012). Rodgers explains:

> ... both of them [Plowman and Jackson] really know their stuff. [...] they
> really know comedy so they don't give you silly notes and they trust you
> [...] If you say, 'I think it's funny'. They don't go, 'No, it isn't. Change
> it to that.' They go, 'Alright then. I don't. I think it's a bit mental but off

you go.' [...] That's what you need and that's what's really changed in comedy. It's really really fall into pieces on that editorial front ... (Interview 2012)

Rodgers' remarks link to Seaton's (2004) discussions on the significance of executive support. Seaton notes that ground-breaking programmes happen by giving imaginative people a space to work. However, she adds that "quite often in broadcasting the source of creativity is also at an organisational level" (2004: 153). This means that while ground-breaking works are consequences of the creative decisions the primary creative personnel and the creative managers make, we also need to consider commissioners, executive producers and channel controllers who hire the producer and the writers, and give the production team the space to flourish (Seaton 2004: 153–154). Similarly, Plowman (Interview 2012), Lumsden (Interview 2011) and Murphy (Interview 2011) define their roles as enablers. For example, Lumsden describes her role as head of comedy commissioning as "enabling other people to feel confident to have a go at the idea that they have at the back of their mind" (Interview 2011). Lumsden (commissioner) and Plowman (executive producer) also describe their roles as motivators. They explain that a part of their role is to laugh. Lumsden (Interview 2011) states that as a commissioner she needs to have a wide sense of humour and be open to new and different types of comedy that is suitable for the time and will be enjoyed by the audience. She says she is "ready to laugh" and encourage creative professionals to bring out their potential even though the type of comedy they are doing may not suit her own taste. On the other hand, Plowman (Interview 2012) explains that no matter how many times he might have watched a scene being performed his role is to laugh and give confidence to the performers, the writers and the team.

Rodgers' previous remarks suggest a change in the editorial practices of executives in the Corporation. Rodger's attitude reveals something different than the arguments presented in *chapter four* by various comedy and drama writers and producers, and academics, who argued that there was a loss of creative autonomy and an increase in managerial control during the 1990s. Looking back to this period from 2012 Rodgers believes that they had more creative freedom in the 1990s. This might suggest a romanticisation of the past, where professionals and researchers experiencing the BBC in the 1990s, look back to the eighties or sixties and think that they had more creative

freedom then and that the nineties were creatively stifling (Gray 1995; Day-Lewis 1998; Born 2004). Plowman (Interview 2012) and Murphy's (Interview 2011) views add weight to this perspective. As Murphy puts it, things depend on "how the BBC feels about itself" and this is very much to do with the people working in the Corporation from senior executives to creative managers. This means that the trust and freedom that *The League*'s producer and its writers felt is very much to do with the people they worked with and may not represent the general situation in the Corporation. Considering that this was a period when the Corporation's structure and strategies (its macro context) centred around cost-efficiency, managerial control and market-led decision making (Abercrombie 1991; Born 2004; Hesmondhalgh 2007), personal professional practices still seem to play a significant part in shaping individual production processes. This argument is also corroborated in the works of various scholars (*chapter four*). For example, Davis and Scase (2000) suggest that professional practices tend to shape the execution of tasks, the definition of organisational roles in relation to specific circumstances and conditions as well as organisational structures and strategies. Scannell (2013) argues that the system of television production is saturated with human intentionality.

On editorial censorship, Plowman thinks that the Editorial Compliance Unit, which works independently from commissioning and programme making, elicited a lot of moaning from writers and performers. Due to various "editorial failings" in the BBC stronger editorial controls were implemented over the years (BBC-Trust 2008). Plowman explains that his personal attitude "has always been mostly to ignore them" (Interview 2012). Yet he adds that in the context of *The League*, they were very lucky because they worked with editorial policy staff Claire Pall, and lawyer Shelly Bradley who did not interfere with their work. Plowman explains that there were not many negative responses from the editorial front, "They were usually pretty good. [...] but I do remember that there might have been the odd thing where [...] [they] would say, 'Well! Honestly, that's libellous. Take it out'" (Interview 2012). Plowman refers to a scene from the Christmas Special where the vicar of Royston Vasey (played by Shearsmith) is smoking in church and bitterly talking about a nativity that was made by "monk kiddies", "I remember that 'monk kiddies' got huge objections" (Interview 2012). Plowman cannot remember any other line or scene that got objections from the senior management, "That was about it. Surprisingly...

Then I would have been partly the person saying, 'Take that out' and I never did because I liked what they did" (Interview 2012). Plowman's remarks illustrate the significance of working relationships in television production.

In terms of external intervention, Jemma Rodgers argues that the BBC wanted to make the programme a bit more mainstream and make them appeal to a larger audience. Interestingly, Sarah Smith, the first producer of the show, during the commissioning process pitched the idea as "A bit like *The Archers* only dark" (Plowman Interview 2012). Rodgers, however, argues that they did not pander to anyone's tastes: "We were always very sure we were making a show that was going to be a pretty cult show [...] It was basically going to have an audience of who ever wanted to watch it" (Interview 2012). Plowman notes that *The League* actually has the capacity to be popular and mainstream (Interview 2012). For example, it is filled with small gags, which are at times quite slapstick and simple, from bodily wit (people falling down) to swearing and jokes about bodily parts and fluids (people drinking piss or talking about masturbation). Plowman explains:

> So they always had it in them to be popular entertainers but they also didn't want to be that particularly. That wasn't what interested them. What interested them was, their influences [...] gothic cinema and gothic writing generally. (Interview 2012)

Plowman's remarks suggest that although *The League* has mainstream gags in it, they are not the main "meat" of the show. What defines *The League* are the cult references and its dark side focusing on horror and social embarrassment within comedy, which are not particularly mainstream. The group was able to stay with their cult roots because a) BBC 2 was not after high ratings, and b) their style was supported by their creative managers, which gave the group creative freedom.

Plowman explains that when *The League* was produced they did not think about an audience:

> There wasn't a target audience except you sort of know by the nature of the material that you are ...probably going to get a younger rather than older audience. And therefore your aim should be to try and trail it and push it and get marketing for it and press for it that pushes it towards that audience so at least they know it's on. And then all you can do is to make

the very best programme you can. And stand back and hope people will watch it. (Interview 2012)

In terms of marketing, Plowman thinks that the programme "was undervalued in the sense that [...] the BBC could have put more money and resources behind trailing it and pushing it, making a fuss of it" (Interview 2012). For him the main difference between the BBC and a commercial channel like Channel 4, which *The League* would also be suitable for as it has a younger audience, is that Channel 4 would have pushed the show harder in terms of marketing. However, he points out that if it was on Channel 4, the budget would be lower, there would be advertising breaks during the episodes and each episode would be about twenty-one minutes rather than twenty-eight.

8.2 Integrated Levels of Influence on Production Decisions

This section examines, in detail, some of the events during studio and location filming. It aims to demonstrate the combined influence of the macro level ('Producer Choice' and YTV's strategies in relation to the economic and organisational context), the meso level (executive interventions and the creative managers' decisions and practices), and the micro level (daily practices of primary and secondary creative staff,) elements. *8.2.1* looks at studio shooting in front of audience and laughter tracks. *8.2.2* examines on location shooting, daily practices and coincidences.

8.2.1 *Yorkshire TV Studios, Filming in Front of an Audience & Laughter Track*

This section explores the studio filming and laughter track. It examines how and why certain decisions were made and what their implications were for the production and filming process. The analysis reveals the influence of various factors such as 'Producer Choice', YTV's priorities, YTV audience, BBC 2 controller, the executive producer, the performer's backgrounds, the director, and the warm-up comedian.

Plowman explains that *The League* was filmed in a complicated manner. In the first two series, some parts were filmed on location and some in the studio in front

of an audience. The cast and the crew first would go off and do the location filming and then would go to the studio to film the rest of the sketches. As explained in *chapter five*, the filming location was Hadfield and the studio space was Yorkshire TV Studios. Plowman notes that normally BBC executives would choose to film in a studio as location filming is typically very expensive:

> ... usually we, we as me as the head of the department or the people in charge of [the] budget would say, 'You can't go outside London without incurring vast amounts of expense.' Because you have to put everybody up in a hotel, so instead of it costing ... 12,000 pounds a week or a day to keep a crew filming, it costs 12,000 plus. (Interview 2012)

However, Plowman indicates that the deal Jemma Rodgers made with the Yorkshire TV Studio was so cheap that it made it possible to go to Hadfield (near Manchester), film on location, film the studio bits in Leeds at YTV and still cover the accommodation charges. Also 'Producer Choice' allowed the team to film BBC in-house productions outside the BBC premises, as long as the costs were lower (*chapter four & five*). Jeremy Dyson jokingly describes YTV's attitude, "They pay you to go film there!" (cited in Abery 2002: 19). For having such a significant influence on the production process of *The League*, it is important to question YTV's reasons for agreeing to a deal that does not have any economic benefits for the studio. Rodger's (Interview 2012) explains that YTV was the only ITV company that owned their own land. At the time shows such as *Countdown* (1982-) and *Emmerdale* (1972-) were filmed at their premises, which meant that they had enough money coming through. On top of being economically self-sufficient the studio personnel was also sympathetic towards 'northern' comedy. Rodgers (Interview 2012) notes that the studio manager Brian Abram and many of the studio crew had been working at YTV back in the days when they were filming well-known sit-coms such as *Rising Damp* (1974–1978) and *The Beiderbecke Affair* (1985). The fact that the writers and the producer were all from Yorkshire was also a positive aspect. Rodgers notes, "I think it was just fun for them. ...it was a nice break between *Countdown* and *Emmerdale*" (Interview 2012). It seems as if YTV's economic stability and the professional sympathy of YTV staff towards *The League* contributed to the making of the show.

Figuring out the balance between location and studio filming was another issue. Pemberton (Interview 2012) explains that if the decision had been left solely up to

them, they would have chosen to film in a studio as they felt comfortable performing on stage in front of an audience. However, the director wanted to focus on location filming as he found the studio restricting (Plowman and Pemberton Interviews 2012). On the other hand, senior BBC executives were leaning towards studio filming as it is cheaper (no travelling costs and it takes less time to shoot) but also because it allows a studio audience. Plowman notes that himself as the executive producer and the Channel Controller, Mark Thompson, pushed for studio filming with an audience (Interview 2012). Plowman explains the reasons for this, "Because controllers ... get very worried that they'll commission something and that it just plain won't be funny" and adds, "But if you do something in front of an audience it's somehow proof that it's funny because the audience laughed" (Interview 2012). Plowman noted that for him studio filming in front of an audience was the one decision that was imposed on the creative team.

Plowman recalled going to Leeds to see the studio filming for season one and realising that they were sharing the studios with an ITV quiz show. This meant that *The League* would share its audience with this programme. Rodgers (Interview 2012) describes the audience demographic as "biddies". Plowman notes that YTV were doing things, which were so far away from *The League* that he was quite worried about what their audience would make of their show. On top of the audience demographic, the fragmented studio filming process was another issue that could put the audience off (Plowman Interview 2012). The studio filming worked as such: first the scenes that were shot on location for a particular episode in story order (the exterior shots and the sketches that were filmed on location) would be shown. Then the actors would perform the sketches within that episode. One tricky point here is the fact that there are only three actors playing all the parts thus they need to change their costumes and make-up for each sketch strand. Plowman suggests that the comedian Ted Robins who did warm-up for the studio filming was a key factor in keeping the audiences entertained, especially for the first season:

> ... bless Ted... he did a great job as warm up. ... the Yorkshire audience would come in, who have never seen this show, don't know what the hell [it is], there is nobody in it that they know and we are asking them to laugh. And Ted was great at doing very end of the pier stuff to keep them [laughing] between scenes and between filmy bits. (Interview 2012)

Rodgers explains that there was another level to filming in front of an audience, which is to do with performance. In order to test what works, they shot two versions of the pilot episode, with and without the audience. Rodgers elaborates:

> ... to be really honest it made a huge difference. So something like the Denton's piss drinking scene went to another level because it was in front of an audience. And because the boys are used to a live audience it worked really well. (Interview 2012)

Figure 4: The Dentons drinking what they call 'aqua vitae', the water of life.

When they reached the second season the writers wanted to ditch the laughter track. For the second series, Rodgers (the producer) and some of the writers put together an argument to lose the laughter track:

> So we edited it [series 2] with and without [the laughter track] and showed it to Jane Root, who was the Controller of BBC2 at the time, and gave a very good reasoned argument as to why we should lose the laughter track. And she was very nice, very polite, all very nice, "Yes, la la". I walked her out the door and she basically said if you want a third series

you might want to put the laughter track on. Sort of nailed it there and then. (Interview 2012)

With the hope of getting a third season *The League* kept the laughter track. The discussion on the laughter track revolved around two issues: its existence would eliminate the risk of alienating people at home, on the other hand, its absence was a sign of 'quality' – trusting the audience to know what is funny and signified a cinematic approach (Rodgers Interview 2012, Plowman Interview 2012, and Hunt 2008: 109). Rodgers explains that she and the director were torn between whether to keep the laughter track or not. For Plowman, with *The League* "sometimes you don't know whether you are allowed to laugh. [...] 'OK! So here are two characters who are probably bonkers. Am I allowed to laugh?'" (Interview 2012). Similarly, Rodgers argues that it is debatable if the audience watching at home "really know what the bloody hell is going on unless somebody is laughing at Papa Lazarou" (Interview 2012).

Rodgers (Interview 2012) explains that at the time having to keep the laughter track "was a big deal" because the writer/performers felt that it got in the way of the energy of the show and the composed music. However, Rodgers argues that keeping the laughter did not harm the show but helped it:

> [...] what people tend to forget is that if you are doing something filmic it tends to be in a cinema or in a big space where a lot of people are laughing along side you so you don't need it [laughter track]. If you take something a bit confusing, which actually does have the rhythm of gags [...] and you watch it yourself on your own or with your family you want the sense that other people are laughing like you would have in a cinema. (Interview 2012)

Rodgers also notes that they were very truthful about the added laughter and did not augment it, "If people didn't laugh we didn't put a laugh in" (Interview 2012). When it came to the Christmas Special and series three, the laughter track was eliminated. This was due to the way the shows were written. The Christmas Special was shot as a horror portmanteau film and a laughter track did not have a place in it. The third series, as Rodgers (Interview 2012) points out, did not have the "gag rhythms" that the first two seasons have. While the first two seasons still embraced

the sketch show structure that allowed room for a laughter track, the third season almost completely abandoned the sketch format and became a serial, which again left no room for a laughter track (see *chapter seven*). After season two laughter track was no longer a discussion topic.

The discussions around filming in the studio and the laughter track illustrate television production as a system of negotiation, mutual adjustment, struggle and compromise (Becker 1976; Davis and Scase 2000; Hesmondhalgh 2007; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011). The analysis reveals that restrictions, that might be considered frustrating, cannot always be considered creatively crippling.

8.2.2 *Shooting at Hadfield*

Focusing on the filming process on location, the analysis reveals the influence of the producer, the writers, and the residents of Hadfield. The analysis also points to precariousness and serendipity in television production drawing on examples from daily practices.

As explained in *chapter five* the producer came across Hadfield, the filming location by chance while she was driving. In order to get permission from the town council, she described the show as "slightly darker *Last of the Summer Wine*" (Interview 2012). By the time the show came to the second series, the residents realised that the town itself became a character and the town's residents were not happy about the way 'they' were portrayed, "How dare you turn us into this insane horrible horror village" (Rodgers Interview 2012). By season two, *The League* had developed a fan base, who started to crop up in the village, trying to take photos. Some of the fans would be there during and after filming. There were incidents where some tried to sneak into the filming locations, such as the residents' homes, pretending to be part of the film crew, which upset the residents (Cross Interview 2012).

Although the council was happy with the filming as it was bringing money to the town, the residents started to get uncomfortable. Rodgers explains, "... it's tricky with things like that. Mrs. Magee wanted to park up and get her fish and chips at four o'clock and there is a film crew there and they do get quite pissed off" (Interview 2012). While the first two seasons were filmed on location in Hadfield, the following

Christmas Special was not. Rodgers explains that she decided not to film at Hadfield to "punish the town" for being difficult during the filming of season two. Rodgers explains that by the time they went back to Hadfield in the third series the local council was very helpful as they realised that filming could move somewhere else (Interview 2012).

By the third series, the residents also started to make money out of *The League*. There were many fans going to Hadfield to see "Royston Vasey". Seeing this as a business opportunity the town's residents created their own *The League* merchandise. The news agent started selling photos from the shoots, magnets and snow globes, while the butcher started to promote its produce as "Local meat for Local people!" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2003). The enthusiasm of the residents, however, started to affect filming. The performers talk about how disturbing the residents became as they were trying to take pictures (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005j). In 2012, the newsagent in Hadfield still has a big folder with photos from the shoots and explains that "strangers" still come to town from all over the place to see "Royston Vasey".[2] Pointing to a picture of Shearsmith, the newsagent describes the actor as the angry one who would never smile when they were taking pictures.

Hadfield seemed to cater for most of the visual requirements of *The League* (see *chapter five*). The pub, the newsagent, the job centre, the butchers shop and the betting shop were all there, and were all used in the series. Apart from the major visual elements (the moors, the shops, etc) the location even provided some minor aspects. For example, the bleak look of the community centre, which was used as the job centre meant that the production team did not have to change much. As the writers explain, one day while shooting season one they saw some old decorations in the dining hall. They describe it as a "the detail of the Christmas past... never taken down" (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005c). This gave them an idea and they asked the production designer to put up a lone balloon and bits of old decorations in the room which they used for the job centre sketches. For them, this showed how miserable the situation in the job centre is (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005c).

These examples from the production and filming process demonstrate the influence of different elements on production. YTV's economic stability at the time and the introduction of the BBC's Producer Choice initiative form part of the macro

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[2]The author's own observations in Hadfield.

Figure 5: Hadfield butcher packaging (*The League of Gentlemen Scripts and That*: 189)

forces that affected the show. The producer Jemma Rodger's deal with YTV studios and her decision not to film in Hadfield for the Christmas Special, the executives push for a laughter track and Rodgers' position between the writers' and the executives is part of the meso level of programme making.

The daily practices on location and the struggle between the writers/performers and residents forms part of the micro elements. The balloon example from the set and Rodgers finding Hadfield by luck show that, although programmes are made within a system, serendipity is also an important part of programme making. The next section focuses on the meso and micro aspects of creating *The League* in more detail.

8.3 Collaboration, Working Relationships & Production Atmosphere

This section examines the professional practices of the primary creative personnel and creative managers (Ryan 1992; Hesmondhalgh 2007), the working relationships between various members within these groups, and the production atmosphere in the

creation of *The League*. It examines the collaboration process, individual input and creative freedom in the making of the show. It illustrates how individual practices can reshape the execution of key tasks and underlines the specificity of each production.

8.3.1   *Team Work*

During their initial stage shows and the radio show the writers were working as a small group. When they stepped into television they became part of a larger production. Steve Pemberton (Interview 2012) notes that during the production of the TV series they never felt as if they were losing control. They were still very much involved in the decision-making. However, Pemberton (Interview 2012) also notes that they had never worked on television before, and there was a lot they did not know about. Therefore it was important that they worked with the right people who would support them. Pemberton explains:

> ... we felt well supported, well guided. We had a really strong producer, Sarah Smith. We had a great visual director, Steve Bendelack. And we had people who listened to us in every department, who wanted to take our ideas – the costume, the make-up – they didn't want to impose anything on us. And it was really fruitful collaboration and the way to go forward. You can't be closed off to people's ideas. Because we could have made a show we wanted to make and it would have been very different. It would have been more studio based. It would have been not anywhere near as good. You do have to listen to people who have done that before. (Interview 2012)

According to Pemberton (Interview 2012) the show "stayed intact from the beginning to the end" due to the strong production team. Focusing on the teamwork Jemma Rodgers explains, "...one of the things remarkable about *The League* is that everybody on that team knew they were making something special from day one. That doesn't happen very often" (Interview 2012). Signifying the uniqueness of the production Rodgers states, "It was a real huge team effort actually. More than you often get" (Interview 2012).

According to Rodgers (Interview 2012), the writers' strong relationship and their firm understanding of their work formed the foundations of the fruitful creative collaborative atmosphere during the production, and gave the production team "a playground" to experiment and "confidence to really stretch". The executive producer, Jon Plowman reflects on teamwork in TV production:

> ... you know when something is working when a team does better than average. [...] If you say to your team, 'Look! I want it to be a bit like this' and they go, 'Oh! Yeah! You know what would be great, it could also be a bit like this and we can add to that'. And that's how you get good stuff I think. So when the cameraman is also getting involved, or adding rather than subtracting as it were. Or rather than thinking, 'When can I go home?'. (Interview 2012)

In the context of *The League*, Plowman notes, "And I think they were always adding rather than subtracting if that make sense" (Interview 2012). A good example that illustrates Plowman's argument is the Dr. Carlton strand in season three. Here the first part of the story takes place in Dr Carlton's office where the doctor has a conversation with his patient Mrs Beasly. The setting is very bare. The scene was shot in an almost empty room against a white background. The writers explain that various members of the crew did not like this particular scene (Pemberton in Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005g). While the writers' believe that the crew disliked it because of its content, Rodgers explains that the reason was not editorial. Rodgers notes, "Steve Bendelack didn't like it because it had a really boring background" (Interview 2012). The producer explains that Rob Kitzmann (the director of photography) and Grenville Horner (the production designer) felt the same. Rodgers adds:

> In the grand scale of the texture of the show a scene of two people sitting at a table against white gauze was not where anyone wanted to be. You know, that is why they would have felt a reaction against it. (Interview 2012)

The producer (Interview 2012) points out that the rest of the scenes that belonged to this storyline were shot in a completely different style. These scenes took place at Dr Carlton's house. Gatiss describes the space as "a gothic pile, really dark" and adds that he really likes it (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005g).
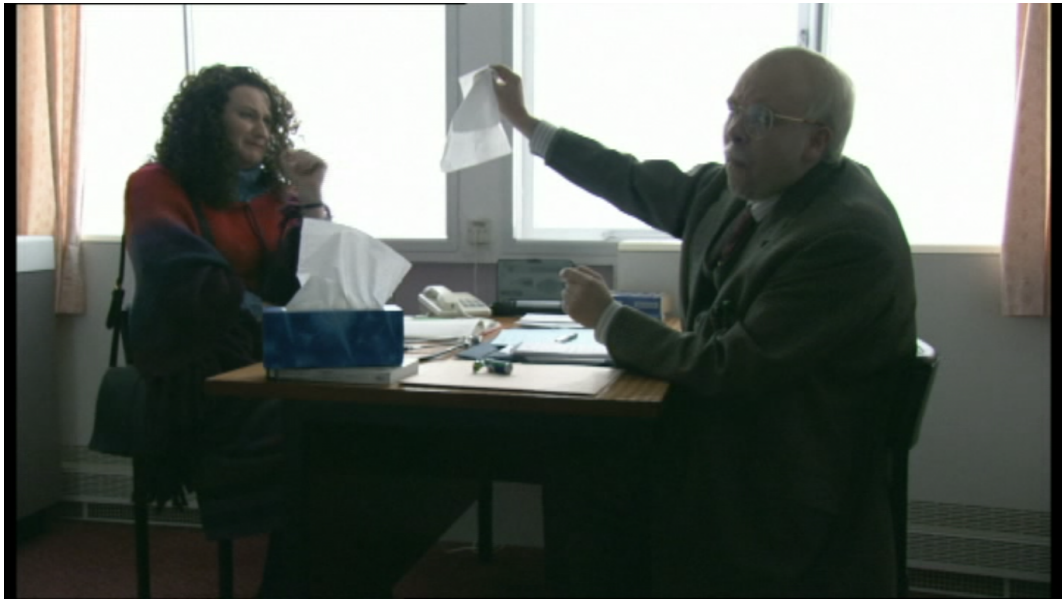
Figure 6: Dr. Carlton's office (part one)

Figure 7: Dr. Carlton's house (part two)

This example reveals a lot about the atmosphere during production and the mind set of the production crew, who were motivated to add their input to the initial text. This takes us to the themes of creative freedom and trust, and how the

writer/performers who conceived and shaped the show provided space for the other primary creative personnel to add their individual input. For example, the costume designer Yves Barre suggests that he "was given complete freedom" and adds:

> [...] on *The League*, I have to say, I had the most freedom in my career. Amazingly. Very little, anyone ever questioned anything or ever said, 'You can't do this' or 'You can't do that'. So that's very rewarding. Because that means[...] the stress level was down. (Interview 2012)

Barre explains that the one thing he needed to worry about was to get things on time and on budget, which is common in every production. But he did not experience any stress due to his relationship with the writers. Barre notes, "It was a trust. [...] I liked them instantly but they had to trust me. [...] I had to earn the trust initially in the first series and I had to prove myself. But it comes naturally" (Interview 2012). He argues that he earned the writer/performers' trust by coming up with ideas they liked and being on the "same wavelength" with them. He states, "the trust [is] what gave me all my freedom" (Interview 2012).

Another interesting example that reflects the production atmosphere concerns overruns during filming. Rodgers explains that, "...every day went [over] almost by 20 minutes – which again you couldn't do now. So probably over the scale of a shoot we probably got an extra week out of them [production crew] with overruns..." (Interview 2012). Rodgers notes, "...people did use to get pretty upset about it understandably..." yet adds that, "... people tolerated it because they could see that no one was fucking about. It was just purely down to the amount of ambition for the shoot hours we had" (Interview 2012). Rodgers points out that the overruns were partly due to their appreciative attitude towards the creative work:

> Part of the reason we always did shoot too much, and actually one of the things that was that I used to try and dilute a bit by the end of it, was that because everyone was working so hard and was being so creative there was a kind of, very much of an atmosphere on set that everyone's department should be respected. [...] so if Grenville [Grenville Horner, the production designer] dressed a set we wouldn't just shoot the scene we would make sure his set was seen. We would make sure that the costumes were seen. (Interview 2012)

This section examined the production atmosphere in the creation of *The League* and highlighted the collaborative atmosphere and respect for individual creative input. The analysis revealed that the creative space given to crew members, particularly the primary creative personnel (the director, the costume designer, the set designer, etc.) (see Hesmondhalgh 2007) makes the production and filming process unique. The next section looks in greater detail at the individual input of various primary creative personnel.

8.3.2 *Primary Creative Personnel & Individual Input*

Although TV production involves a large group of people, Rodgers (Interview 2012) suggests that in the context of *The League* there was a core group of people who were deeply engaged in developing the distinct look of the show. This group, apart from the producer, included the primary creative personnel (Hesmondhalgh 2007): the director, the director of photography, the production designer, and the costume designer. The key themes here are the individual creative input of various professionals and how they managed to create a cinematic look with a relatively small budget. The analysis links to the discussions on the compromises that are made during production, and achieving artistic goals under financial pressures in *chapter four*.

Rodgers explains that initially they wanted to shoot the series on film. However, since it would be too expensive they could not. They followed a different route in order to create a similar effect. For example, Rob Kitzmann, the director of photography, graded every shot on set while filming to create the grainy filmic look seen in the British realist tradition (see *chapter three*). This was a time consuming task, but it was a lot cheaper than shooting on film. This grainy look that can be found in films was applied to the sketch strands with soap-opera essence such as the job seekers strand with Pauline, as well as the Iris and Judee strand about the relationship between a house owner and her cleaner. The look of these sketch strands is the brainchild of the director, Steve Bendelack (see Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005d). Pemberton notes:

> ... it's a great gift for a director [...] to take a comedy show and give it a
> filmic look. And it was a great challenge for him on a comedy budget to

> make it look as good as it did look. ...the grading, the cinematography, that sense of scale, sense of place. I mean you know he didn't invent it. He didn't because it came from our suggestions but it was his. The look was his and we were bowled over by it. (Interview 2012)

Rodgers (Interview 2012) points out that Grenville Horner's (the production designer) sets were crucial to the filmic look. Horner designed film stage sets with a fourth wall. The producer (Interview 2012) argues that the sets "cost a fortune", and even though they might have used a specific set just for one scene they were still willing to spend that money, which was not a common practice, especially in comedy production. The costume designer, Yves Barre (Interview 2012), explains that Horner was very quick to grasp the gothic essence of the show. While the soap opera like sketches were filmed in a location (e.g the job centre was filmed in Hadfield's community centre), the more gothic sketch strands (the local shop and the Dentons) were filmed in Yorkshire TV studios, thus the production designer built their sets completely from scratch. Horner paid particular attention to the smallest elements in the sets. For example, he even designed snow globes that are displayed at the local shop. Similarly, in the third season, the storyboard artists, Mike Nicholson, designed some flyers that were seen in a few scenes. Nicholson (Interview 2012) observes that it was incredible that they were willing to pay him to design flyers, which would only be seen for a few seconds.

Figure 8: A snow globe designed for the series by Grenville Horner, the production designer.

Rodgers notes that during pre-production, herself, Steve Bendelack (director) and Grenville Horner (production designer) used to take the writers' ideas, do their research and come up with a plan (to find locations, develop the sets, and decide on how scenes would be shot). Then they would present it to the writers. At that point they would all get together, go over all the elements and come to an agreement. Costume design followed a similar process.

The costume designer, Yves Barre, explains that the costume design process started off with lengthy conversations with the writers and the illustrations they provided. Barre took all these as a starting point, then processed all the given information and developed them further through his analysis and research. The analysis and research period, for Barre, involves "anthropological" research. He states that a part of his job is to "study the tribe" and in the context of *The League* he adds, "The material given to me was a new tribe and I had to study, analyse and research" (Interview 2012). This new tribe is the inhabitants of the fictional town Royston Vasey nestling in the north of England. As part of his "anthropological" research Barre went on a recce, "the trips to the north are absolutely crucial. [...] I had to go and meet these people in the flesh. I had to inspire myself by seeing real people they've written about" (Interview 2012).

It is in the following stage, during costume fittings, where the costume designer's input began to crystallise:

> Say if we take Papa Lazarou, Reece [Shearsmith] knew how he wanted Papa Lazarou to look like. He already knew, but then what I would do is I would guide him because I said, 'Well, you are only five foot six, so let's give you high heels to give you more statue/stature as a character'. And the trench coat was probably his idea initially but then I found the perfect [one]. My input comes in... (Interview 2012)

Pemberton says that *The League* had very long fitting sessions, which as Barre notes is "totally unusual". Pemberton explains:

> [...] we used to go and book half a day to try costumes. Because you are trying trying trying until something feels right. And Yves is a brilliant collaborator in terms of that, completely gets us, completely gets our humour and is willing to spend that time. (Interview 2012)

The costume sessions took a long time because three actors played all the characters, each playing approximately twenty characters in one season. Barre explains:

> I had to spend a day with [...] each artist in order to do twenty people. You couldn't do it in two hours. Simply because you had twenty characters to talk to and we had to discover together, me and them together, in the fitting. We tried hundreds and hundreds of ideas of jackets or dresses when we were doing women. And I had to start edging the paddings. You know so that took a long time. Unheard of, I mean even today. [...] I haven't done that since *The League* really. (Interview 2012)

Barre explains that he approaches every project with the same principle. He listens to the project leaders, then moves on to conduct his analysis and research, which is followed by fitting sessions. Yet Barre adds:

> [...] the principle was exactly the same. There was no difference. But the fun was. I mean in the fittings we laughed and laughed and laughed and laughed. [...] they would play their characters in front of me. They would develop the characters they would always do the voice [...] It was just laughter all day. But it was very serious as well. (Interview 2012)

Apart from the writer/performers the only person Barre worked closely with on the visual content was the director, Steve Bendelack, with whom the costume designer had several conversations about the visuals. During one of their conversations, the director and the costume designer came up with the concept of 'timelessness' that they both utilised in their practice. For example, the director combined various visual styles, such as the 1960s and 1970s British 'Kitchen Sink' film look, with grainy and bleak imagery, as well as the dark gothic look that can be seen in horror movies. On the other hand, Barre mixed clothes from a variety of periods in order to develop the sense that this was a unique world. Another person the costume designer worked alongside was the production designer Grenville Horner. Barre explains that he would ask Horner about the colours and patterns used in the sets so that he could choose his costumes accordingly. This, however, was a usual practice observed in every project. Barre also points out that money was very tight for such an ambitious project, to try to create something filmic, but the fact that he gathered most of the costumes from Oxfam shops helped lower costs (see *chapter six*).

8.3.3   *Working Relationships: The Producers & The Primary Creative Personnel*

This section focuses on the working relationships between the producers Sarah Smith and Jemma Rodgers, the writers and the director. It shows the high level of involvement the producers had in both administrative and creative decisions. The analysis looks at the role of the producer as a mediator between the primary creative personnel and the executives (Hesmondhalgh 2007; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011). It finds that the relationships between the producer, the director and the writers were very intense. However, it also illustrates that disagreements can lead to fruitful collaboration and positive creative outcomes.

The radio production's core team was rather small. It included the four writers, also performing their material, and Sarah Smith as the director/producer. As discussed previously (*chapter five & seven*) it was Smith who pushed the idea of setting all the sketches in one location, and contributed the formation of the format of the show, reflecting the producer's involvement in creative decision-making. Dyson notes that Smith, "had a kind of grasp of what the thing was at the heart of what we did, that was different from what other people did" (cited in Hunt 2008: 12).

With its first season *The League* won BAFTAS, Royal Television Society awards and a Golden Rose of Montreux. For the second season the producer Smith wanted to direct the show as she was interested in becoming a director (Plowman and Pemberton Interviews 2012). Plowman gives his perspective on the situation, "I said, 'Look we just won all these awards with you producing it and Steve [Bendelack] directing it. It's silly to sort of then go on do series two with a completely different team'". He explains that he promised to give her a directing role in another project (Interview 2012). Plowman thinks that Smith is a very talented producer and she had the potential to be a good director and in fact from 2001 onwards she moved on to directing in film and television. However, Plowman adds, "I was keen, and I think they [the writers] were keen, that we kept Steve [Bendelack] on board" (Interview 2012).

Both Plowman and Rodgers (Interviews 2012) state that Bendelack was instrumental for the look of the show. Plowman (Interview 2012) explains that the look of the show was one of the keys to its success, "it looked odd and interesting and filmy",

which was what the writer/performers were looking for. Rodgers (Interview 2012) also points out that Bendelack "has a very filmic eye" and he got the references that the writers were referencing. Pemberton notes that Smith:

> didn't have the same understanding, in terms of the visuals, that Steve Bendelack had, because she wasn't a great pop culture person. She was a great producer in many ways but didn't get a lot of our references visually the way Steve had. So we were reluctant to lose Steve Bendelack and so she said, 'Well, look I either want to direct or I don't want to be involved'. So it was her decision ultimately, because we didn't actually want her to direct it having seen what a great job Steve had made of it. (Interview 2012)

When Smith left the team, Rodgers took up the producing reins. Pemberton explains their relationship with Rodgers: "She was already a part of the team. She worked very very closely with Sarah. She was the line producer, so it wasn't like a new person coming on board" (Interview 2012). Rodgers (Interview 2012) too suggests that it was a relatively smooth transition. She notes that during the production of the first series Smith was working on various shows (both in the US and in Britain) at the same time and was "fairly absent from a lot of production at the first series" due to her work load. Rodgers adds, "because I was the associate producer I was already, when Sarah wasn't there, deputising" and "ended up doing a lot of day to day hands-on producing of the show" (Interview 2012).

Rodgers' connection with the writers goes beyond the TV show. Rodgers went to Leeds University together with one of the writers, Jeremy Dyson, and was a good friend of his. After Leeds, Rodgers went to art school and became a runner at London Weekend Television. Around the same time the League was starting their live shows, and, being Dyson's friend, Rodgers went to these gigs to support them (Rodgers Interview 2012). At the same time Gatiss and Dyson were also sending Rodgers some material for her to promote at LWT (Rodgers Interview 2012).

Rodgers notes that an interesting aspect of their relationship is that the group's trajectory went up at exactly the same time as her career (Interview 2012). In the mid nineties Rodgers started to work her way up at the BBC. She became Smith's production manager on *Friday Night Armistice*, *Saturday Night Armistice* and *Elec-*

tion Night Armistice. In 1997 Rodgers became Smith's associate producer around the same time Smith saw the League at the Fringe Festival – the year the group won the Perrier Award. Rodgers explains,

> Sarah picked them up at the Perrier to do the radio and I was working with Sarah at the time. [...] I said to Sarah, 'Oh God! Of all the shows you are doing I would love to do that.' And I know them. I know their history, I know a lot about these characters... (Interview 2012)

Rodgers notes that, "...because I had grown up with them, I got their comedy very quickly and kind of knew the sort of references and the sort of thing they are into really" (Interview 2012).

Rodgers also touches on another key aspect: being able to bring a different perspective to the table. This point illustrates that while it is important for a producer to be sympathetic to the written work and the initial idea, it is also important to be critical. For example, while *The League* writers are horror and gothic fans who take inspiration from literary, and visual works of these genres, Rodgers has a very different taste, "...hilariously I hate horror films. I find them terrifying. Genuinely don't like them and so don't watch many horror films" (Rodgers Interview 2012). During the production, as the writers were making various references to their favorite films, Rodger asked them to put together a reference tape with all the bits they wanted to use in the show for the crew to watch. This tape was useful for pinpointing costumes, period and style as well as some shots and scenes they were referring to in various horror films (Rodgers Interview 2012). Rodgers explains that her indifference to horror films helped her maintain a critical distance to the work, and made it more accessible. Rodgers saw her job as making sure that gothic and horror references were not self-indulgent but had comedic or narrative functions, too:

> I think, to be honest, potentially one of the reasons it worked was that I'm the only person in the team who wasn't a massive horror fan. So for me it had to work in its own right as something that I wanted to watch and I got and thought that it was funny and had value rather than for me going, 'Oh! That's really clever because it came from that film'. So it had a double meaning, which I think has helped it. I have a feeling that if it had a producer that [is] so horrortastic, it might have just gone a bit self-

indulgent on the horror front. Where as I kind of go, 'Why are they doing that?'. And they go, 'Because it was in this film!' and I go, 'Hmmm... It's not very good. Can we do it subtly?'. I think it actually helped on *The League*. It helped to make it more accessible. Hah! Ironically. (Interview 2012)

Rodgers states that one of her main jobs was to foresee any kind of complaints that might happen and get prepared to handle them with care to avoid any kind of conflict. Rodgers notes:

It was scary to produce because it was so on the line. And you were constantly thinking [...], 'Ok so is this the right side? What would I say to reply?' You know what, really, how would I defend this? (Interview 2012)

Being able to offer a different perspective also comes up in other subjects. Rodgers explains that one thing she had to keep an eye on was misogynistic material because, as the writing team was an all male group, she felt that they could potentially miss those elements. Rodgers illustrates her point with the dating agency sketch in series two episode three, where, as described in the script, "an intense man", Iain goes to a dating agency to fill out an application form. Rodgers explains:

The punch-line was supposed to be, 'I didn't rape her!' and I [...] just said, 'You can't do 'I didn't rape her.' It's really cheap and it's just horrible.' And we had quite [a] big to do about that [...] And it doesn't deserve it. It's not big. It's not clever. [...] It's not really on the right side of the line. (Interview 2012)

Rodgers states that her role as a creative manager involved both creative and administrative decision-making. She was the bridge between the administration and the talent. As discussed in *chapter five*, she protected the talent from stressful and complicated issues related to the budget. The costume designer Barre, who complained about the lack of money especially in the first series, notes that Rodgers was very good at making things happen on a shoestring (Interview 2012). Similarly to the writers, the other primary creative personnel did not know about the economic issues after commissioning went through and they just thought that it was an odd production decision to have a several months break during the production (*chapter*

5). The associate producer/producer found the filming location, which had a huge impact on the look of the show (*chapter five*) and made a deal with Yorkshire Television for studio filming, which came to influence the budget and the production atmosphere (*chapter five and eight*).

A good example that reflects her creative input is from series three. Rodgers (Interview 2012) explains that one of the rules they decided with the writer/performers in the series was not to use prosthetics because they felt it was important to see the performers' expressions and financially this would keep costs down. Yet, in series three Gatiss was very keen on having a prosthetic neck for the character Lance. Lance was a minor character who appeared first in series two but became a main character in series three. Lance is a very large man and in series two, in order to make the performer look fat, the costume designer built a collar into which the actor could sink his neck (see *chapter six*). However, Rodgers suggests that in series three Gatiss thought that the prosthetic neck would help him get into the character. At first Rodgers agreed to go with Gatiss' request. Rodgers explains, "So we spent a lot of money having this big prosthetic neck built. We did a screen test on it and it wasn't brilliant but the prosthetic man kind of ... persuaded me that it would be alright" (Interview 2012). Rodgers remembers watching Gatiss on set at the beginning of this specific shooting day and having mixed feelings about the prosthetic neck. The producer had to leave the set to go to Manchester where they were editing the show. By the time Rodgers returned to the set the crew had already shot half of Gatiss' scenes with the prosthetic neck (Interview 2012). Rodgers watched the footage and felt that rather than helping the prosthetic was "ruining the character". Against strong protests from the director Bendelack, and Gatiss, Rodgers decided that they had to reshoot everything without the prosthetic. Rodgers explains, "Mark [Gatiss] was incredibly upset about it and unhappy. [...] And he didn't talk to me for about three days and I just said, 'I'm really sorry, it has to come off. It's ruining the character."' (Interview 2012). Although at first Gatiss was unhappy about the producer's decision, when he reflects back on it he agrees that the prosthetic neck did not work (Dyson, Gatiss et al. 2005h). This emphasises the significance of the critical distance that a producer needs to have within a project. As the director and the actor were deeply involved in the filming they felt reluctant to lose the amount of material they shot. Although Rodgers was sympa-

thetic and had respect for the writers' work, she also had the courage to stand back and disagree.

We observe other administrative decisions made by Rodgers on set. Rodgers planned the shooting schedule, made sure that the filming was done on time and on budget. As noted in *8.3.1* the filming process saw major overruns due to the team's level of ambition. Rodgers explains that there were many shooting days where they realised that they could not shoot everything on time and had to make sacrifices. This would require either cutting various scenes or shooting a scene in one take. Although, the director was unhappy having to compromise his vision, the team went with the latter option, to do single takes. Rodgers explains:

> There is a lot of that in *The League*. A lot! Because we just had to. And actually the problem was you could cut it but it was all so good. [...] So I was always very much of an opinion that I rather we shot a simplified version of every scene than cut scenes. (Interview 2012)

For example, the Dr. Chinnery sketch in season two episode one, and the job seekers sketch in season one episode three were filmed with a single camera in one take. For the latter scene, the writers thought that filming it in one go worked very well, and even referenced the 1963 film *The Servant*, although this reference was not planned at the writing stage. A similar example from season two is Pop's dinner scene. Rodgers explains that this was the last scene left to shoot for season two and they had already overrun. The producer explains that she took an administrative decision to film it with multi-camera in one take. As the scene was about eleven minute long, for her it was not possible to get it right in one take with a single camera. After Rodgers decision, the director Bendelack was so upset that he left the studio. Rodgers explains that they made up later.

These examples from the filming process demonstrate the creative input as well as the administrative position of the producer. They also demonstrate that time constraints and coincidences during a specific filming day do influence the look of the show. It is clear that administrative and financial decisions are inseparable from artistic decisions, and that it is misguided to put economic and creative concerns in opposition (Newcomb and Alley 1982; Hesmondhalgh 2007). The analysis illustrates that the producer's role is to balance these concerns. The examples also reveal that the

production process of *The League* was not a completely smooth process, and that TV production is a process of negotiation, mutual adjustment, struggle and compromise (Davis and Scase 2000; Hesmondhalgh 2007; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011).

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter tested theories on media production and points to the integrated influence of macro, meso and micro factors (Cottle 2003; Mittell 2004). Using examples from the history of the BBC and the creation process of *The League* it illustrates how various factors impinge on the production process.

It demonstrates that macro elements, such as the economic and the organisational context, the organisational policies and structures such as 'Producer Choice' do not solely influence programme making. Through the study of micro instances such as studio and on location filming, it reveals the significance of the human factor in television production. Here, the analysis supports the theories of Scannel (2013), Cottle (2004), and Davis and Scase (2000) who argue that the production of TV programmes is saturated with human intentionality, and that wider engagements are practically managed by individuals within the production process. This means that, although there is a system in which programmes are made, this system is open to creative manipulation by senior management, creative managers, and primary creative personnel (Newcomb and Alley 1982; Hesmondhalgh 2007).

The examination of the events surrounding the laughter track, studio filming, budgets, editorial control, prosthetic make-up and overruns during the filming stage reveal that programme making is a process of negotiation, mutual adjustment, struggle and compromise (Millington and Nelson 1986; Davis and Scase 2000; Hesmondhalgh 2007; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011). The study also reveals that innovation occurs through negotiation of conventions and constraints, and that creativity is not a process of complete freedom (Becker 1976; Newcomb and Alley 1982).

The study pinpoints the significance of the executive level, which does involve a kind of creativity (Seaton 2004). For example, the roles of channel controller, commissioner and executive producer can be described as enablers and motivators who, depending on individual practices, enable and motivate creative personnel and pro-

ducers to reach their artistic goals. The analysis also reveals the dual role of the producer. *The League*'s producers Sarah Smith and Jemma Rodgers had creative and administrative roles in the creation process of the show. They also acted as mediators between the executives and the creative personnel (e.g. the issue of laughter track and the budgets) (Hesmondhalgh 2007; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011).

The analysis illustrates that financial and artistic decisions are closely linked, and that they should not be considered entirely separate. Television production requires a balance between creative autonomy and artistic vision, as well as time and funding. Here, creativity, culture and commerce rub against rationality and analytical thinking. The producer's role is, in a certain fashion, the embodiment of this balancing act. As Newcomb and Alley (1982) and Millington and Nelson (1986) suggest, a successful producer is a person who is able to recognise and point to the interactions at these different levels. In the case of *The League* the producer, as a mediator, was trying to enable the writers to reach their creative goals, while also keeping a critical distance that allowed her to stand back and disagree. For example, while the close relationship between the writers and the producer Jemma Rodgers, and Rogers' devotion to the project were key to its development (e.g. her deal with Yorkshire Studios saved a lot of money and made the project possible at a time when they were having severe budget problems), it was also important that the producer could provide a different (arms-length) perspective. As different opinions rubbed up-against each other more fruitful creative and administrative decisions were made. This distinguishes the relationship between producers and writers as one of the most intense and potentially fruitful relationships in television production (Tunstall 1993; Eaton 2005).

The analysis also reveals that the production atmosphere and working relationships are significant determinants in programme making. It points out that *The League* is an adaptation process not only because the TV show sprung from the initial stage shows, but because of individual inputs from the producers and the primary creative personnel. The producers, the director, the costume designer, the production designer and the director of photography, as 'adapters', transformed the writers' vision.

The analysis demonstrates that 'special moments' occur through teamwork, and individual practices. *The League* is a testament to the fact that although organisational policies and structures may be restricting, it is the individuals who practically

manage them at various levels – the organisational level (senior management such as the executive producer), the meso level (the producers) and the micro level (the primary creative personnel) – to make space for creative autonomy in a challenging broadcasting system. However, the positive influence of certain organisational elements in reaching creative goals, such as the need for *The League's* tone to meet the channel strategies and comedy tradition of BBC 2, also needs to be recognised.

9

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This study of *The League of Gentlemen* (BBC, 1999–2002) is an integrated cultural-industrial-textual examination that incorporates discursive, historical, anthropological, and micro-level analysis. The study primarily, but not exclusively, dealt with the television incarnation of *The League*. It unpacked the end product and reconstructed the creation process of the show by keeping various sources and methods in dialogue with each other. This revealed the various elements that influenced the creation process of the show, and the way the production ecology worked for *The League*. The study tackled three research questions. Combining macro, meso and micro levels of analysis made the interlocking nature of the research questions evident:

Q1 How did the creation process of *The League of Gentlemen* develop?

Q2 How does the television production ecology work within the BBC with particular reference to *The League of Gentlemen* as a case study?

Q3 How did the "special moments" in television, such as *The League of Gentlemen*, emerge in the BBC during the 1990s, a decade that is considered to be "infertile" by some researchers (e.g. Born 2004)?

This chapter provides a summary of the research frame and provides an overview of the research findings. It reflects on the results and considers the relevance, significance and implications of the study for the field of media studies. Finally, it explains some of the theoretical and methodological limitations of the study, and considers possibilities for future research.

9.1   Research Frame & Contribution to Knowledge

This study of *The League* involves an extensive application of a discursive approach to a specific creation process. Through an approach that integrates cultural, historical, anthropological, industrial and textual examination, the study becomes a testing ground for theories about media production, media anthropology, and media history explored in the conceptual framework – *chapter three* and *chapter four* (for example, Alvarado and Buscombe 1978; Newcomb and Alley 1982; Cottle 2003; Scannell 2003; Mittell 2004; Rothenbuhler and Coman 2005; Hesmondhalgh 2007; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011). The analysis illustrates and analyses the debate (see *chapter four*) about the BBC's production ecology, the Corporation's organisational structure and strategies, creative autonomy in TV production, primary creative personnel, creative manager and executive professional roles, individual input and the stages in the creation process by providing concrete examples from the conception, commissioning, production, filming, and post production stages of *The League of Gentlemen.*

Scannell (2007: 2–4) and Hendy (2013: 70) argue that programme making develops through the 'hidden labour of production'. Hendy explains, "In broadcasting, we're dealing with things made by living human beings. Programmes don't just fall off the end of a production-line: there's a 'hidden labour' of production involved – production, that is, by thinking, feeling individuals..." (2013: 70). Scannell (2013) describes this as the "invisible care structure of production processes" and suggests that everything we see on TV is saturated by human intentionality. This thesis made this "invisible care structure" visible through a discursive study of *The League of Gentlemen* that revealed many layers in television production. Following Cottle's (2003) framework, the study illustrated the integrated web of interactions in three levels of analysis that influence the creation process of *The League* as a whole as well as each other:

> Macro level: the organisational system 'Producer Choice', the 'Bi-Media' initiative, organisational strategies, channel strategies and tone (Radio 4 and BBC 2), BBC's long running production traditions (the transfer of comedy output from radio to television), industrial conditions (e.g. the growing independent sector in the UK, Yorkshire Television Studios being economi-

cally self-sufficient and professionally sympathetic towards 'northern' comedy shows)

Meso level: creative managers' (producer, and associate producer) roles and practices – how they work through organisational policies (e.g. low budgets, and cost-effectiveness) and editorial control (e.g. executives insisting on a laughter track) – and working relationships (e.g. the producers and the writers; the producers and the executive producer), as well as senior managerial roles (the two senior creative manager in British broadcasting, executive producer and genre commissioner, as well as channel controller).

Micro level: the production atmosphere (e.g. overruns in the filming process, the production crew being away from London together as a team, and being away from the BBC headquarters), the writers' backgrounds and inspirations (e.g. their northern up bringing, love of gothic, horror and drama), individual input of the primary creative personnel (e.g. the director and the costume designer), creative autonomy (for the writers as well as the other primary creative personnel), and serendipity (e.g. finding the village of Hadfield by coincidence).

As commissioner Lucy Lumsden (Interview 2011) explained, comedy production is not an exact science. The analysis illustrated that comedy production works according to certain guidelines (e.g. organisational strategies and structures), yet also depends on the individuals and how they work together (Lumsden Interview 2011) (see also Steemers 2010; Hendy 2013: 70–89).

Analysis of *The League* and the exploration of other cult shows in the literature review such as *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, *Boys from the Blackstuff* and *Our Friends in the North* demonstrates how a bottom up approach enables us to read the broadcasting environment in question more clearly. It also helps to get a clearer picture of the BBC through time and pinpoint how perceptions of the creation process have changed. The specificity of this study does not hinder our understanding of the institution as a whole, but helps chart the workings of the BBC. As Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011: 61) argue, recognition of the specificity of creative labour and a meso-level analysis are vital for understanding how creative industries work.

This research is also the first study of *The League of Gentlemen* that combines textual analysis with production studies, media history and media anthropology in a detailed fashion. It took textual analysis found in academic literature (Hutchings 2004; Thompson 2004; Hunt 2008; Toylan 2012) as well as the production insights found in grey literature (see for example, Miller 2000; Abery 2002a; Abery 2002b; Rodgers 2002) to the next level. It is through this approach that the study was able to yield new insights. As Seaton (2004: 157) explains, programmes are like ice-bergs and the end product is a fraction of what goes into making a show. Combining textual analysis with production studies approaches, media history and media anthropology revealed what is under the 'ice-berg' – 'the hidden labour of production' (Scannell 2007; Hendy 2013). For example, through an integrated analysis it was possible to reveal that the single shot scenes that allude to specific films were not created with an artistic intention but because of time and financial limitations (*chapter eight*). The idea behind single shot scenes also came from the producer, not from the primary creative personnel. Secondly, the visual elements in various sketch strands (*chapter eight*) that resemble British social realist imagery (grainy and bleak) were the director and the director of photography's collective input. These examples illustrate that by combining textual analysis with production studies we can pinpoint the people who contributed to the visual and ideological framework of the show, and the different aspects that come to impinge on the production processes.

Another important contribution of this study is to give a voice to other contributors of *The League* who might be overlooked because of the strong authorial signature of the writer/performers. This study a) brought insight into some of the 'hidden professions of television' (O'Dwyer and O'Sulivan 2013) such as the costume designer, b) it brought these professionals' experiences and perspectives to light, and c) analysed the creation process and the final product of these new insights.

The next sections illustrate the findings in more detail under four headings in relation to the research questions. Table 1 demonstrates which research questions are answered in each section:

Table 1: Breakdown of the Findings

Section	Theme	Related Research Question
9.2	1990s: An era of creative repression in BBC comedy production?	RQ 2 RQ 3
9.3	Division of Labour	RQ 1 RQ 2
9.4	How do the 'Special Moments' of TV occur?	RQ 1 RQ 2 RQ 3

9.2 1990s: An era of creative repression in BBC comedy production?

On 11 July 2012 I met Jon Plowman, the renowned producer/executive producer of successful TV shows such as *French & Saunders* (BBC, 1987–2007), *Absolutely Fabulous* (BBC, 1992–2012), *The League of Gentlemen*, *The Office* (BBC, 2001–3) and *Little Britain* (BBC, 2003–2006) in the reception area of BBC Television Centre, White City. As we walked down the corridors of the TV Centre Plowman turned to me and said, "Welcome to the BBC. This is where things don't happen". It is interesting that someone who has accomplished so much at the BBC describes it as a place of restriction. While I took Plowman's half joking comments with a pinch of salt, deep down his words portray a sense of pessimism that seems to linger in the people who have been working in the BBC through the years. The contextual framework (*chapter three* and *four*) that considered creation processes and the experiences of various professionals from writers to producers in comedy and drama from the 1960s to the noughties also suggested a sense of pessimism about the present and romanticisation of the past.

Chapters three and *four* reveal that that the BBC went through series of crisis and reconstructions (both financially and structurally) throughout the decades mentioned. The analysis shows that there are contradictory accounts of these periods. For example, observers who looked back to the 1960s interpreted this period as a 'Golden Age' of BBC broadcasting that flourished under Director General Hugh Greene (1960–1969) (see Gardner and Wyver 1983; Briggs 1995a: 331–332; Briggs

1995b: 339; Born 2004: 320; Hendy 2007: 19–21). This period has been described as a period of risk taking, innovation and creative autonomy for producers and primary creative personnel. However, at the time professionals such as Dennis Potter and the Pythons complained about the difficulties they had in terms of scheduling, budgets, editorial control and censorship (Wilmut 1982; Day-Lewis 1998; Palin 2007).

The 1990s was another period of reformation and crisis for the BBC. As the literature review reveals, this era is characterised by commentators as one of diminishing appreciation for craftsmanship, a decrease in creative autonomy and risk taking, as well as a rise in managerial control, accountancy, cut backs and formula-driven programme making (Barnett and Curry 1994; Gray 1995; Day-Lewis 1998; Kung-Shankleman 2000; Born 2002; Born 2004; Hendy 2007). However, producer Jemma Rodgers' (Interview 2012) account of budgets, editorial control, and creative freedom for *The League* reveals a rather different story. Looking back to the 1990s from 2012, Rodgers (Interview 2012) suggests there was less managerial control, and more opportunities for creative manipulation and creative autonomy for producers and creative personnel in the 1990s.

These different accounts demonstrate the problematic nature of the term 'Golden Age' and show (see *chapter two*) that individual memories can vary considerably. The analysis tells us that each era has its own complexities and complications. Professionals working across different decades, often felt restricted in terms of creativity. Although, there may have been major structural and cultural changes at the BBC in the 1990s, there was still room for innovation or creativity. This study reveals that the shifts in the BBC were not as straightforward as some commentators seem to suggest (Day-Lewis 1998; Born 2002; Born 2004). It shows that the 1990s was not simply a period of crisis in BBC programme making, but an exemplar of how the production ecology was changing.

Although the introduction of 'Producer Choice' and 'Bi-Media' to the BBC in the 1990s signified a more market-led approach to programme making based on tried and tested formulas (Barnett and Curry 1994; Kung-Shankleman 2000; Born 2004; Hendy 2007), the presence of *The League* illustrates that there was still room for cultural breakthroughs that met the demands of diverse and varied content (Becker 1976; Heirich 1976).

The study of micro-instances in *The League*'s creation process also illustrates that each production is unique and has its own particular creative hurdles. This was supported by the exploration of micro instances from *Boys from the Blackstuff* and *Our Friends in the North* (*chapter three* and *chapter four*). This discursive approach revealed that the television production ecology works through negotiation, conflict, mutual adjustment and compromise (Davis and Scase 2000; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011). It showed that organisational, economic and artistic restrictions can also lead to fruitful creative and administrative decisions (Becker 1976; Hendy 2013: 87).

The study shows that 'Producer Choice' and 'Bi-media' influenced the commissioning and production stages of *The League*. They resulted in a quick transfer to television but also led to the writers having to compromise their possible second radio series due to a strain between BBC radio and television (*chapter five* and *eight*). The organisational strategies that focused on cost efficiency meant that the budget offered to the show was low. This meant that cuts had to be made. 'Producer Choice' for the first time in BBC history allowed in-house productions to be made outside the BBC's premises as long as this lowered costs. Associate producer Jemma Rodgers used this new situation to book Yorkshire TV Studios for studio filming. This subsequently influenced the filming location as the team tried to find a place close to the studio space to keep costs down. Being outside London also influenced the production atmosphere. As Rodgers noted being away together as a team helped increase a sense of togetherness, focus and artistic collaboration. Being away from BBC premises also helped the team to distance themselves from some of the more restrictive provisions of 'Producer Choice' including tighter managerial control and restrictions on experimentation to minimise economic inefficiencies. This shows the influence of macro elements, as well as the opportunities within the system for creative manipulation and how individuals manipulate perceived restrictions to reach their creative goals. Table 2 draws out the key findings from the BBC in the 1990s (*research question two* and *three*).

9.3 Division of Labour

9.3.1 *Senior Managerial Staff*

Analysis of *The League* focused on the roles and practices of channel controllers, genre commissioners and executive producers. These roles are described as 'administrators', 'executives' or 'senior management', yet within British television, they are also labelled as senior creative managers (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011: 96; Hendy 2013: 71).

The study revealed that a kind of creativity exists at managerial level. Channel controller Stuart Murphy, comedy commissioner Lucy Lumsden, and executive producer Jon Plowman explain that while their roles do not involve direct creative input, they see themselves as enablers and motivators. They enable creative professionals to exercise their artistic ambitions and encourage them when necessary. These interviewees stated that the level of creative space in productions, depends on personal relationships, just as much as organisational strategies or guidelines. For example, Plowman and Lumsden said that innovative programmes involve risk taking, and that they tend to choose programmes that they think have a potential to succeed even though these shows may not suit their personal tastes.

The analysis particularly illustrated Plowman's personal approach to television production. The analysis revealed that Plowman's attitude was to develop a sense of trust with the production team. He kept his interventions to a minimum. He was only involved when there were problems, which could not be solved by the team. To ensure more financial freedom, he moved the money from other productions. Plowman's professional background as a theatre director influenced his approach to television production, because the theatrical approach is to place more emphasis on the writers' artistic vision. For instance, he did not intervene when the format changed for the Christmas Special and season three (*chapter seven*).

The study revealed different degrees of editorial control. For example at one point, senior managerial staff including Plowman insisted on a laughter track and studio filming in front of an audience for the first two seasons against the wishes of the writers. However, the laughter track was dropped for the Christmas Special and

season three, as the show moved away from its sketch show roots. Looking back at this period, producer Jemma Rodgers argued that keeping the laughter track for the first two seasons was the right decision, although at the time she supported the writers' opposition to it.

9.3.2 *The Producer as a Creative Manager*

The study examined the practices of Sarah Smith (the producer of the radio show and the first season of the TV series) and Jemma Rodgers (the associate producer for the first season and the producer of the rest of the TV series) as creative managers.

The analysis showed the producers as "mediators" between senior managers and the primary creative personnel (Hesmondhalgh 2007: 64; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011: 96). The different perspectives of the writers and the senior managers about the issue of the laughter track and the way Rodgers steered the middle course and found an agreeable solution is an example of the producer's role as a mediator. Another example is the way Smith and Rodgers dealt with the budgetary problems after the commissioning of season one. The producers acted as "shock absorbers" and protected the production crew from having to deal with the financial problems of the production.

The producers worked to achieve solutions (Newcomb and Alley 1982: 70). For example, Rodgers' deal with Yorkshire TV Studios significantly lowered the production costs and made the production possible. Rodgers' role as a producer was "to ensure that the best artistic product is achieved within the funds and time available" (Millington and Nelson 1986: 38). On overruns Rodgers' approach was to film some scenes in one shot to get them done rather than cutting scenes out. For her this kept the writers' vision intact and helped finish the task without going significantly over budget and overtime. This reveals how artistic and economic decisions are inseparable. It is the "self-conscious" producer who balances the two aspects (Newcomb and Alley 1982: 77–78).

Smith's and Rodgers' practices reveal that producers can also have creative input. For example, Smith came up with the idea of setting all the sketches in one place and creating narrative arcs that link different stories. Rodgers found the filming location,

which had a massive influence on the look of the show. She intervened on scenes that could be interpreted as misogynistic. She also influenced the look of the show by deciding against prosthetic make-up in certain cases.

The producers were also sympathetic towards the primary creative personnel and especially the writers' vision without allowing them to indulge their own personal tastes. For example, Rodgers trusted and supported the writers' vision yet did not share their taste for horror films and cinematic references. At times she was willing to disagree with them. For her the scenes had to work for narrative and comedic purposes rather than simply for as an indulgence for cinematic references. Through disagreement more balanced creative and administrative decisions were made.

Overall, the examples demonstrate the hidden nature of the producer's work as a creative manager who is paddling beneath the surface (Hendy 2013: 75–76). These activities are located in the meso (middle ground) and micro levels (day-to-day activities) of television production.

9.3.3 *Primary Creative Personnel*

The study of the production process of *The League* revealed that the writers had significant creative authority. As Pemberton (Interview 2012) explained they were very much involved in the decision making processes and they felt well supported by their producer, executive producer as well as other creative contributors such as the costume designer and the director.

Although *The League* is highly branded by the authorial signature of its writer/-performers, the analysis illustrated the fact that the show was the product of a collaborative process. It revealed that while the writers were given a high level of creative autonomy, they provided a creative space to other contributors as well (Pemberton, Barre, Rodgers and Plowman Interviews 2012). As Rodgers (Interview 2012) indicated the writer/performers' firm ideas and the incredible amount of detail they put into the creation of this unique world, allowed the producers and the primary creative personnel a space to experiment. Plowman (Interview 2012) explained that the writers managed to get the best out of people by giving them challenging tasks such as requesting a cinematic look on a low budget. The analysis revealed that among

the primary creative personnel, the director, the costume designer, the production designer and the director of photography were especially influential in shaping the show. For example, the costume designer developed elaborate paddings, which became part of the signature look of the show. The production designer developed elaborate film sets that reflected the gothic style of the show and added to its high production value. The director and the director of photography created the British social realist film look through grainy and bleak imagery that added to the appearance and the ideological framework of the show. None of these aspects were suggested by the writers. Rather their addition reveals the significance of a range of individual inputs into television productions.

While primary creators (in this case the writers) do come up with ideas, these ideas are shaped and influenced by other creative contributors (Ryan and Peterson 1982; Ellis 2004). In the case of *The League* the costume designer, the production designer, the director, and the director of photography, acting as 'adapters', took the vision of the writers and added to the visual, narrative and ideological framework of the show. We can thus characterise creation processes as 'adaptation' processes, even if professionals' level of input varies according to each production. Table 2 charts the key findings about the division of labour (related to *research questions one*, and *two*).

9.4 Managing Creativity: How do the 'special moments' of TV emerge?

The analysis shows how different elements from the macro, meso and micro levels of production contribute to cultural breakthroughs.

The literature review pointed that innovative programming depends on individual talent and flexibility of the system (Born 2004; Hendy 2013). Similarly for Plowman, Murphy, Lumsden and Rodgers (Interviews 2011 and 2012) risk taking, innovation and creative freedom were vital for developing cultural breakthroughs such as *The League*. The analysis of *The League* demonstrates that flexibility still existed in the 1990s due to the interventions of professionals such as the executive producer who were enabling it on the organisational level, and producers who were mediating between artistic, organisational and financial concerns.

Lumsden described creative programme making as "holding hands and just leaping into the unknown" (Interview 2011). *The League* did not emerge from the viewers' demand to see a comedy-horror hybrid about residents of a small town in the north of England. It was born out of the writers' vision, given a space to grow by the senior managerial staff, and shaped by the producers and the primary creative personnel.

In an age of consumer choice, market-led decision making, commissioning on the basis of viewer votes, and 'do-it-yourself' culture (Hendy 2013: 77–78), surprisingly, audience considerations were not an issue during the creation process of *The League*. When looking at the studies of the BBC from this period (Barnett and Curry 1994; Born 2002; Born 2004; Hendy 2007), it is clear that *The League* was not a common example. Its emergence was linked to BBC 2's channel strategies and a long running comedy tradition. Rather than simply chasing ratings BBC 2 commissioners were looking for programmes that can stand out from the crowd, bring prestige to the channel and lower the audience age in order to justify the licence fee. This tells us that ground-breaking shows emerge when artistic concerns and vision align with channel strategies. Another key point is although the Corporation was going through a market-led reorganisation, it was not – and still is not – a commercial channel. Therefore, producers do not have to worry so much about commercial pressures arising from advertising, and this provides more space for innovation.

The study revealed the significance of teamwork, working dynamics and production atmosphere for creating a breakthrough programme. However, the creation process of *The League* was not a completely smooth process. The production crew faced several problems along the way. What makes *The League* special is the way these problems were handled and overcome.

After season one, the producer Sarah Smith wanted to take on role of the director, which was not well received by the writers and the executive producer. Smith later on left the team. Pemberton and Plowman's (Interviews 2012) remarks reveal the significance of working with the right people. In their opinion Smith was a good producer – she understood the essence of what the writers were aiming for and contributed to the development of the show. However, it was the director Steve Bendelack who understood the visual references that the writers referred to. This was very important, as the cinematic look was a key factor in the show. Smith's departure was

not catastrophic (i.e. nobody is unreplaceable) since Jemma Rodgers who was already immensely involved in the production and is a long-term friend of the writers replaced Smith. This meant that the production continued in a relatively smooth manner. Mike Nicholson (Interview 2012) argues that changes in a production crew can affect the production atmosphere and that if the chemistry between people does not work, this can affect the production.

By looking at the director, the costume designer and the production designer's contributions the analysis illustrated the significance of being on the "same wavelength" as the writers (Barre Interview 2012). This helped the professionals to earn the writers' trust, which then enabled them to have creative freedom to add to the text. Table 2 charts out the key findings on managing creativity and how the 'special moments' of TV emerge (related to *research questions one, two* and *three*).

9.5   Concluding Remarks

This study examined how the production ecology worked for *The League*, and has contributed to broader discussions about the 1990s BBC broadcasting environment and comedy production. *The League* offers an appropriate case study to ask how cultural breakthroughs emerged in the 1990s.

The study provided a testing ground for theories about media production, media anthropology and media history (for example, Alvarado and Buscombe 1978; Newcomb and Alley 1982; Cottle 2003; Scannell 2003; Mittell 2004; Rothenbuhler and Coman 2005; Hesmondhalgh 2007; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011). It is argued here that the specificity of this study and its bottom up approach do not hinder our understanding of the institution as a whole, but help chart the workings of the BBC (Mittell 2004). The study demonstrated that combining textual analysis with production studies, media history and media anthropology brings new insights into the creation process of a TV programme, and contributes to a more rounded understanding of the show as well as the contexts it is created in.

The study of micro-instances from *The League*'s creation process illustrated that each production is unique and faces different challenges. The analysis lends support to theories, which argue that production ecologies work through negotiation,

conflict, mutual adjustment and compromise (Becker 1976; Davis and Scase 2000; Hesmondhalgh 2007; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011).

The study demonstrated that the creation of the show was both a collaboration and an 'adaptation' where the initial text provided by the writers was shaped by other professionals. The show was born out of the writers' vision, given a space to grow by the senior managerial staff, and shaped by the producers and the primary creative personnel. When we put the micro context of *The League*, which revealed that the writers and the producers had a great level of creative autonomy, into the larger context provided in the literature review (*chapter four*), it indeed became clear that the level of creative freedom is different in each production.

The analysis of *The League* demonstrated that the three levels of media production mutually affect, and are affected by, each other. It demonstrated that they all contribute to cultural breakthroughs, and that the 'hidden labour of production' (Scannell 2007; Hendy 2013) lies in the meso and micro levels that focus on individual input, professional practices and working relationships. Cultural breakthroughs emerged when:

- Professionals work their way through organisational systems and recognise spaces for creative manipulation,

- Professionals work with the 'right' people (e.g. mutual trust), within a positive production atmosphere and with positive working relationships,

- Professionals have creative autonomy at the macro (through the help of senior staff), meso (the producer overcoming restrictions) as well as the micro level (giving a creative space not only for the writers but other primary creative personnel),

- and when the artistic vision aligns with channel tone and strategies.

Most importantly, this study revealed that the shifts in the BBC were not straightforward and the 1990s was not a period of crisis in BBC programme making as some commentators have suggested (Barnett and Curry 1994; Day-Lewis 1998; Born 2004). It demonstrated that although the BBC was going through major cultural changes in the 1990s, innovative programming continued because of professionals who were

working within and through the new broadcasting system to create ground-breaking content.

In terms of the limitations, it is important to note the vast scale of production, the large amount of people involved with *The League* and the constraints on access to these professionals. This study did not provide insight from all the professionals involved in the creation process of *The League*. However, it provided insight from people within different professional categories – executive personnel, creative managers, primary creative personnel and technical staff (Hesmondhalgh 2007). Another issue is the vast scale of information surrounding the subject. The study tried to include a large amount of information from various registers to provide a rounded analysis. Some information that was discovered, although interesting, was not included in this study to be able to maintain a focus. This means that there is still a space in this study to grow and develop in different forms.

The study recognised the reception side of the creation processes. However, it did not concentrate on that area. One of the implications of this study for future research could be to explore the reception stage. This study should be perceived as part of a wide range of studies that explore specific creation processes (see Alvarado and Buscombe 1978; Millington and Nelson 1986; Scannell 2003). I strongly believe that this study demonstrates the usefulness of a bottom up approach to shed light on not just specific creation processes but also the wider broadcasting environment. It is my understanding that by testing studies that utilise a bottom up approach against each other we will develop a more rounded understanding of the wider broadcasting environment, the 'hidden labour of production', professional roles and specificity of media production.

Table 2: Summary of the Key Findings

Research questions	Key findings
RQ1: How did the creation process of *The League of Gentlemen* develop?	The show was born out of the writers' vision, given a space to grow by the senior managerial staff, and shaped by the producers and the primary creative personnel. Elements from all three levels of television production influenced this process.

Research questions	Key findings
RQ2: How does the television production ecology work within the BBC with particular reference to *The League of Gentlemen* as a case study?	The production ecology works through negotiation, conflict, mutual adjustment and compromise (Hesmondhalgh 2007; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011). The organisational, economic and artistic restrictions can also lead to fruitful creative and administrative decisions (Newcomb and Alley 1982; Hesmondhalgh 2007; Hendy 2013).
Sub-RQs: Where does the creativity/finance threshold lie in media production within the BBC? Where does the creative/executive threshold lie in professional roles within the BBC's organisational structure? How can we define professional roles such as commissioner, producer, writer and costume designer?	Executive producer, comedy commissioner and channel controller roles can be defined as "enablers" and "motivators" as they enable creative professionals to exercise their artistic practices. This, however, depends on personal approaches. The analysis illustrated the producers' role as "mediators" between the senior managers and the primary creative personnel (Hesmondhalgh 2007; Hendy 2013) as well as "shock absorbers" who protect the primary creative personnel from financial difficulties. Artistic and economic decisions are inseparable and the producer's role is an embodiment of this balancing act between creativity and commerce (Alvarado and Buscombe 1978; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011). Being a producer is not just an administrative level job. Producers can have creative input, too. The study demonstrated that the costume designer, the production designer, the director, and the director of photography, acting as 'adapters', took the vision of the writers and added to the visual, narrative and ideological framework of the show.
RQ3: How did the "special moments" in television, such as *The League of Gentlemen*, emerge in the BBC during the 1990s, a decade that is considered to be "infertile" by some researchers (e.g. Born 2004)?	Cultural breakthroughs emerged when: • Professionals work their way through organisational systems and recognise spaces for creative manipulation, • Professionals work with the 'right' people (e.g. mutual trust), within a positive production atmosphere and with positive working relationships, • Professionals have creative autonomy at the macro (through the help of senior staff), meso (the producer overcoming restrictions) as well as the micro level (giving a creative space not only for the writers but other primary creative personnel), • and when the artistic vision aligns with channel tone and strategies.

Research questions	Key findings
Sub-RQ: Was the 1990s a moment of crisis, as suggested at the time, or a moment of change in the way the ecology works?	The 1990s was not simply a period of crisis in BBC programme making, but an example of how the production ecology was changing.
	Although, there may have been major structural and cultural changes at the BBC in the 1990s, there was still room for innovation or creativity.
	Each era has its own complexities and complications. Professionals working across different decades, often felt restricted in terms of creativity.

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APPENDIX

A.1   List of Stage Shows, Radio Programmes, Television Programmes and Films

Stage Shows

This is It! (1995)
The League of Gentlemen - A Local Show for Local People (2001)
The League of Gentlemen Are Behind You! (2006)

Radio Programmes

After Henry (BBC Radio 4, 1985–1988)
The Archers (BBC Radio 4, 1967–)
Dead Ringers (BBC Radio 4, 2000–2014)
Goodness Gracious Me (BBC Radio 4, 1996–1998)
The Goon Show (BBC Home Service, 1951–1960)
It's that Man Again (BBC Home Service, 1939–1949)
On the Hour (BBC Radio 4, 1991–2)
On the Town with the League of Gentlemen (BBC Radio 4, 1997)
Up the Garden Path (BBC Radio 4, 1987–1993)
Whose Line Is It Anyway? (BBC Radio 4, 1988)

Television Programmes

A Change of Sex (BBC, 1979)
Absolutely Fabulous (BBC, 1992–2012)
The Beiderbecke Affair (ITV, 1985)
The Black Stuff (BBC, 1980)
Boys from the Blackstuff (BBC, 1982)

Brass Eye (Channel 4, 1997–2001)

Brookside (Channel 4, 1982)

The Comic Strip Presents... (Channel 4, 1982–2005)

Countdown (ITV, 1982–)

Days of Hope (BBC, 1975)

The Day Today (BBC, 1994)

Dead Ringers (BBC, 2002–2007)

Election Night Armistice (BBC, 1997)

Emmerdale (ITV, 1972–)

The Fast Show (BBC, 1994–2014)

Fawlty Towers (BBC, 1975–79)

French and Saunders (BBC, 1987–2007)

Friday Night Armistice (BBC, 1996–1998)

The Frost Report (BBC, 1966–1967)

Funland (BBC, 2005)

Goodness Gracious Me (BBC, 1998–2000)

Human Remains (BBC, 2000)

I'm Alan Partridge (BBC, 1997–2002)

The League of Gentlemen (BBC 1999–2002)

Little Britain (BBC, 2003–2009)

Last of the Summer Wine (BBC, 1973–2010)

The Office (BBC 2001–2003)

Our Friends in the North (BBC, January-March 1996)

The Mighty Boosh (BBC, 2004–2007)

Monty Python's Flying Circus (BBC, 1969–1974)

Murphy's Law (BBC, 2003–2007)

Nighty Night (BBC, 2004–2005)

Psychoville (BBC, 2009–2011)

Talking Heads (BBC, 1988 / 1998)

Twin Peaks (ABC, 1990–1991)

The Royle Family (BBC, 1998–2012)

Rising Damp (ITV, 1974–1978)

Saturday Night Armistice (BBC, 1995)

Sherlock (BBC, 2010–)

The Smell of Reeves and Mortimer (BBC, 1993–1995)

The Thick Of It (BBC, 2005–2012)

Wedding Belles (Channel 4, 2007)

Whatever Happened to the Likely Lads? (BBC, 1973–1974)

The Young Ones (BBC2, 1982–1984)

Films

Akenfield (Peter Hall, 1974)

Brassed Off (Mark Herman, 1996)

Britannia Hospital (Lindsay Anderson, 1982)

Bronco Bullfrog (Barney Platts-Mills, 1969)

The Full Monty (Peter Cattaneo, 1997)

High Hopes (Mike Leigh, 1988)

The League of Gentlemen's Apocalypse (Steve Bendelack, 2005)

Letter to Brezhnev (Chris Bernard, 1985)

The Likely Lads (Michael Tuchner, 1976)

Nighthawks (Paul Hallam, 1978)

No Surrender (Peter Smith, 1985)

Quadrophenia (Frank Roddam, 1979)

Rita, Sue and Bob Too (Alan Clark, 1986)

The Servant (Joseph Losey, 1963)

Scum (Alan Clarke, 1979)

A.2 List of Interviewees

Interviewee Name	Interviewee Description	Interview Date & Place	Data Type
Steve Pemberton	Writer/performer *The League of Gentlemen*	Date: 05.03.2012 Place: National Theatre backstage	· Recorded · Transcribed
Jon Plowman	Executive Producer *The League of Gentlemen* TV Series	Date: 11.01.2012 Place: BBC Television Centre	· Recorded · Transcribed
Jemma Rodgers	Associate Producer *The League of Gentlemen* TV Series 1 Producer TV Series 2, 3 and the Christmas Special	Date: 06.03.2012 Place: Kudos Production London Office	· Recorded · Transcribed
Yves Barre	Costume Designer *The League of Gentlemen* TV Series, the Live Shows & the Film	Date: 06.06.2012 Place: Interviewee's house	· Recorded · Transcribed
Mike Nicholson	Storyboard Artist *The League of Gentlemen* TV Series Season 3	Date: 15.03.2012 Place: Regent Campus, University of Westminster	· Recorded · Research notes were taken
Lucy Lumsden	2005–2009: Controller of Comedy Commissioning, BBC1, 2, 3 and 4 November 2009 to date: Head of Comedy, Sky 1, 2, 3 and 1 HD	Date: 07.12.2011 Place: Sky Head Offices	· Recorded · Transcribed

Interviewee Name	Interviewee Description	Interview Date & Place	Data Type
Stuart Murphy	2000: Head of Programmes, then Controller, BBC Choice 2003: Launch Controller, BBC3 2006: Creative Director, RDF (independent production company) 2006: Creative Director, Twofour Broadcast (independent production company) 2009 May to date: Sky, Director of Programmes, Sky1 HD, Sky1, 2 and 3	Date: 07.12.2011 Place: Sky Head Offices	· Recorded · Transcribed
Ken Cross	Fan Club Member	Date: 07.06.2012 Place: Hadfield, filming location of the TV series	· Recorded · Research notes were taken