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## **Dallas Bower: a producer for television's early years, 1936-39**

John Wyver, [September](#) 2011

### Biographical note

John Wyver is a writer and producer with the independent production company Illuminations. He has worked as a producer on programmes for BBC, Channel 4, Five, PBS in the United States, ARTE and other broadcasters, and his programmes have been honoured with a BAFTA Award, and International Emmy and a Peabody Award. Recent productions include a BBC film of the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Hamlet* (2009) and a television film version of *Macbeth* (2010) directed by Rupert Goold.

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## **Dallas Bower: a producer for television's early years, 1936-39**

### Abstract

Having worked in the film industry as a sound technician and then director, Dallas Bower (1907-99) was appointed in 1936 as one of two senior producers at the start of the BBC Television service. Over the next three years Bower produced as well as directed many ground-breaking live programmes, including the opening-day broadcast on 2 November 1936; the *BBC Television Demonstration Film* (1937, his only surviving pre-war production); a modern-dress *Julius Caesar* (1938), in uniforms suggestive of a Fascist dictatorship; Act II of *Tristan and Isolde* (1938); Patrick Hamilton's play *Rope* (1939), utilising extended single camera-shots; numerous ballets, among them *Checkmate* (1938); and ambitious outside broadcasts from the film studios at Denham and Pinewood.

Developing the working practices of producing for the theatre, film industry and radio, Bower was a key figure in defining the role of the creative television producer at the start of the medium. Among his innovations, according to his unpublished autobiographical fragment 'Playback' (written 1995), was the introduction of a drawn studio plan for the four cameras employed in all live broadcasts from Alexandra Palace.

Using Bower's writings (among them his 1936 book *Plan for Cinema*), his BECTU History Project interview, the BBC Written Archives and contemporary industry coverage, this [article](#) reconstructs the early development of the role of staff television producer [in order to](#) consider the questions of autonomy, agency and institutional constraints at the BBC in the pre-war years.

## **Dallas Bower: a producer for television's early years, 1936-39**

In May 1936 Dallas Bower (1907-99) was appointed, along with Stephen Thomas, as one of the first two senior producers for the new BBC Television service. Having previously worked in the film industry as a sound technician, editor and director, Bower produced as well as directed many pioneering live programmes during the first three years of broadcasts from Alexandra Palace. His credits include the opening-day presentation on 2 November 1936; the *BBC Television Demonstration Film*, (1937, his only surviving pre-war production); a modern-dress production of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (1938), set in a Fascist state; a transmission of Act II of Richard Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* (1938); Patrick Hamilton's play *Rope* (1939), utilising extended single camera-shots; numerous ballets, among them *Checkmate* (1938); and ambitious outside broadcasts from the film studios at Denham and Pinewood.

Developing the working practices of producing for the theatre and radio, and directing feature films, Bower was a key figure in defining the role of the creative television producer at the start of the new medium. Among his innovations, at least according to his unpublished autobiographical fragment 'Playback' (1995: 14), was the introduction of a drawn studio plan for the cameras in live broadcasts from Alexandra Palace. This [article](#) outlines Bower's ideas and his work from 1936 to 1939 in part as an attempt to reconstruct the early development of the role of staff television producer. [Bower's work will be considered within the context of](#) individual autonomy, agency and institutional constraints (or lack thereof) in the television service of the BBC in the pre-war years.

[As an individual producer in the late 1930s](#) Bower was both exceptional – in his innovative approach to the staging and broadcasting of live studio dramas, dances and operas -- and also exemplary in his commitment within the BBC to a form of unreconstructed Reithianism that sought to

mobilise high culture in the legitimisation of a new medium of modern mass communication. That Bower was able to create the remarkable work that he did (only brief and atypical fragments of which exist today) is because of the confluence of the progressive and paternalist agenda of the BBC as a whole with the marginal position of the new television service in the late 1930s when it was almost entirely free from any institutional, audience or commercial pressures.

In looking at Bower's work between 1936 and 1939, this [article](#) seeks to begin the process of populating these earliest years of television. Previous considerations of early television have rarely focussed on the particular contributions of individual producers, and emphasis has been placed on the role of the *institution* (the BBC) and/or the *technology* (inflexible four-camera live studio transmissions, outside broadcasts) as determining the programming forms of those first years. In an influential article, for example, John Caughie (1991: 30-31) writes of early television drama that 'Adaptation and relay... defined the horizons of aesthetic ambition... within a more or less accepted dependency on an original reality – of event or performance – which went on elsewhere, but was not produced by television.'

In his foundational study *The Intimate Screen*, Jason Jacobs refines this analysis in important ways, acknowledging that 'television drama producers were actively engaged with the formal and stylistic possibilities of the new medium, rather than slavishly relaying West End performances.' (2000: 51) But while Jacobs discusses the contributions of producers to specific productions in the 1936-39 period, his concerns do not include tracing continuities of focus and approach across multiple productions credited to the same individual.

The surviving evidence strongly suggests that, in common with his peers at Alexandra Palace, including [Thomas](#), George More O'Farrell and Fred O'Donovan, Dallas Bower in his programmes did not accept a

dependency on what Caughie characterises as ‘an original reality... not produced by television’. Almost all of Bower’s work in these years results from a clear set of structuring choices applied for and to events created specifically for the medium. As a producer he was an active and determining individual with identifiable interests and concerns who assembled casts and crew for specific projects, and then, acknowledging the limitations of the mediating technologies of image and sound, shaped in significant and sometimes highly innovative ways as a director what he was responsible for bringing to the screen.

The key creative individuals in pre-war and immediate post-war television were producers, just as were their more established colleagues in radio. Bower was contracted as a producer and he usually took this credit on the programmes for which he had overall responsibility (although occasionally a *Radio Times* listing includes the phrase ‘Production by Dallas Bower’). But being a producer also involved all the tasks later associated with a director, including refining the performances of the actors and planning and executing the camera script. Only in the early 1950s did specialisation bring with it the separate credit for a ‘director’.

As to the traces left by the producer Dallas Bower in the early years, the only televisual archive elements are *Television Comes to London* (1936), an introductory film which he co-directed before the BBC service went on air, and the *BBC Television Demonstration Film* for which he was responsible and which was first transmitted in July 1937. Everything else – the plays, operas and variety programmes – was broadcast live long before there was both a viable method of recording them or an institutional concern to do so. But as Jacobs (2000) in particular has explored, written and printed materials can offer deep insights into early television, and as Emma Sandon (2007) has highlighted, so too can the anecdotal recollections of those involved in its creation.

In Bower's case records of these kinds are comparatively rich. In 1995 he dictated a fragment of an unpublished autobiographical manuscript, 'Playback'<sup>1</sup>. Other records relating to his work include a lengthy oral history interview for the BECTU History Project recorded in 1987; personnel files in the BBC Written Archives Centre at Caversham (containing both professional and personal details) together with programme production files; studio photographs; *Radio Times* listings and 'diary' items written by 'The Scanner'; press comment in *The Listener* and elsewhere; and both contemporary and retrospective writings by those who worked with Bower and indeed by Bower himself. Uniquely among the early television producers, Bower was a critic – we might even say a theorist – writing about cinema and television. In 1936 he published a short book called *Plan for Cinema that outlines, among other visionary technologies, a form of 'immersive' film that surrounds the viewer in three dimensions.*

### Incorrigibly “highbrow” : early influences and experiences

Despite the fact that Dallas Bower was the great-great-great grandson of the stage actress Sarah Siddons, as a young man he was fascinated by the new media of radio and film. At school he set up an amateur radio station in his grandfather's attic in Putney and he was then taken on by Marconi. He wrote for magazines about radio and briefly edited *Modern Wireless* before in 1927 securing a job as a sound recordist at Elstree with British International Pictures. There he claims to have recorded the 'Knife, Knife, Knife' wildtrack that Alfred Hitchcock famously used in *Blackmail* (1929) (Bower 1995).

In the early 1930s Bower was a regular at the Film Society screenings, became a sound editor and then a film editor, working under Thorold Dickinson at Cricklewood, before graduating to direct the feature *The Path of Glory* (1933) with Felix Aylmer, Maurice Evans and a young Valerie

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<sup>1</sup> An unpaginated digital file copy of 'Playback' was kindly made available to me by Simon Vaughan of the Alexandra Palace Television Society.

Hobson<sup>2</sup>. Following this Bower began to collaborate with the *émigré* filmmaker Paul Czinner, for whom he worked as assistant director on *Escape Me Never* (1935) and *As You Like It* (1936) -- and for the latter he secured the services of the up-and-coming composer William Walton to write the score.

Bower's interest in television was sparked in the late 1920s by a lecture by one of the pioneering engineers of the technology A. A. Campbell-Swinton. For the December 1934 issue of *The Wireless World* Bower wrote an article about television and just over a year later he offered some further thoughts in his book *Plan for Cinema* where – in line with his involvement with film -- he envisaged that television would develop as 'cinema in the home' (1936: 56). Early in 1936 he sought a position with the BBC television service. Director of Television Gerald Cock appointed a small number of producers with experience of the theatre, but only Bower had worked extensively in the film industry.

Bower stayed on staff with the BBC until the war came, when he went freelance to join the Films Division of the Ministry of Information. To the extent that his career is celebrated at all, he is given credit for suggesting to Filippo del Giudice and Laurence Olivier that they might make *Henry V* (1944) as a patriotic epic (Purser 1999), and he worked on the film as associate producer. In 1941 he returned to the BBC and the radio service, over-seeing among other projects the ambitious and innovative dramatic features written by Louise MacNeice *Alexander Nevsky* (1941) and *Christopher Columbus* (1942). Of the latter, Alan Dent wrote in *The Listener* (1942: 508), 'For plays on a big scale Dallas Bower is the best producer, and therefore Dallas Bower produced.'

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<sup>2</sup> Like so much of Bower's work, the film is lost, but in part because of the survival of a set of production stills it is on the British Film Institute's 'Most Wanted' list (British Film Institute 2010).



After the war, Bower returned to the BBC as a freelance producer and director but for many his productions seemed not to exhibit the same level of professional achievement as before -- for instance, the *Manchester Guardian* described his production 1950 production of William Douglas Home's comedy *Master of Arts* as 'very clumsy and uneven' (Anon. 1950: 3) -- and his short-term contracts were not renewed. After that, his credits comprise something of a ragbag of production roles, including directing an Anglo-French-Russian animated version of *Alice in Wonderland* (1949), producing some eighty early television commercials, and also an executive role on the early television film series *The Adventures of Sir Lancelot* (Sapphire Films/ITC Entertainment for ATV, 1956-57).

The sense that he was unable to sustain the creative achievement of the 1930s may be accounted for by personal problems (his personnel files hint at the strain of dealing with his wife's extended illness). Alternatively, it may be that he was unable to recreate the sustaining creative context with little if any pressure from commercial concerns offered by the BBC television service between 1936 and 1939. In those years, Bower was certainly highly regarded by his colleagues at Alexandra Palace. In 1937, in his first (confidential) annual review at the BBC, Gerald Cock wrote that Bower was particularly useful 'on special productions and those involving a higher degree of imagination and intelligence'. A year later, he recorded, 'Apt to reach out beyond the distinctly practical and to go "highbrow".' And in 1939 Cock noted of Bower that he was, 'Incorrigibly "highbrow", and as such valuable!' (BBC WAC L1/46/1).

To offer an outline of Bower as an innovative and 'incorrigibly "highbrow"' producer for early television, brief case studies follow of four of his productions made between the summer of 1937 and early 1939: his modern dress version of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, an ambitious staging of *The Tempest* (1939) which complemented Shakespeare's verse with the incidental music written for the play by Sibelius; a

production of Pirandello's *Henry IV* (1938); and a presentation in mime of Act II of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*.

### **Working in the studio**

In the inter-war years Bower and a handful of other producers formulated the basics of television studio production. The working methods and approaches drew explicitly on established practices in radio, theatre and cinema production. Bower was clear about which of these established media should be the dominant influence. 'I was quite clear... that the primary requirement was that we should operate in the manner of a film studio rather than the manner of a theatre,' [he recalled in his BECTU History Project interview \(1987\)](#). [He aspired to achieve the visual quality of cinema](#) 'rather than a long shot of a theatre performance.'

He also recalled how the television studios at Alexandra Palace were adapted after the model of a film studio.

Although Studio A (EMI-equipped: four camera channels) was neither built as a theatre nor as a film studio, it soon became clear that for drama production the studio would have to operate primarily in the manner of a film studio. There were tabs (curtains) and a cyclorama (permanent semi-circular indefinite grey backing) but sets would be designed and erected as if for film shooting. (1986: 339)

Certain of the dramas and other productions that Bower, Thomas and others presented from Alexandra Palace had been presented previously on theatre stages. Ballets from the Vic-Wells company, for example, with Margot Fonteyn among the dancers, were a regular feature, but there were also original ballets commissioned for television, such as Antony Tudor's *En Diligence* (1937) and *Portsmouth Point* (1937), the latter set to music by William Walton, and both produced by Bower. Bower also had to spend time mounting revues for television, even though as Gerald Cock recorded in 1937 [that Bower](#) 'loathes plain variety' and, the following year,

‘Temperamental in its best sense. Not very easy sometimes to get down to routine work in its less interesting aspects.’ (BBC WAC L1/46/1).

In ‘Playback’, Dallas Bower gave a sense of how the interests of each of the early producers shaped the output of the service to a significant degree. ‘[Stephen] Thomas concentrated on his *penchant*,’ he wrote, ‘which was the eighteenth century, and I concentrated on what I thought the Service should certainly attempt – Shakespeare and opera.’ (1995: 17).

Nearly two years after the start of the service, in the summer of 1938, the anonymous reviewer for *The Times*, writing about Bower’s modern-dress *Julius Caesar*, reflected that:

Mr Dallas Bower is the most daring of the Alexandra Palace producers, and his empiric productions sometimes lead to strange results, but his version of *Julius Caesar* in modern dress last week was undoubtedly a success... the play, stripped of its classical trappings, becomes a present-day drama of power politics, and the atmosphere of intrigue and unrest is unfortunately but too real in certain countries today. (Anon 1938: 6).

The review was written just six weeks before the Munich crisis.

In productions such as *Julius Caesar* Bower and his colleagues were working with exceptionally limited visual possibilities – usually three or four fixed lens Emitron cameras, only one of which had minimal movement forwards and backwards while shooting; narrow depth-of-field; and no cuts from shot to shot.

[I]n early productions... only dissolves were possible. It was, of course, a severe limitation; on the other hand a cut could be approximately simulated if the vision mixer was skilful and his wrists sufficiently flexible to flick the rheostat knobs through the necessary 360 degrees. Even so, the ‘cut’ was rarely less than the film equivalent of a six-foot dissolve (four seconds) (Bower 1986: 340).

[In February 1939](#), less than a year after *Julius Cesar*, the producer who *Radio Times* was now describing as ‘the experimental-minded Dallas Bower’ (1995: 19) was emboldened to take on *The Tempest*.

*The Tempest* is a Shakespearean director’s joy and for some time I had thought of doing it with the Sibelius incidental music. And this wildly over-ambitious project was about to come into being. The Sibelius music had been commissioned by Gordon Craig for a production in Denmark which never took place. [1995: 19].

The production file at Caversham gives a sense of the complexities of this [broadcast](#) which used all seven camera channels across both Alexandra Palace studios, five microphones (including one for the orchestra) and two penumbrasopes. These were devices for throwing shadows onto the studio backcloths to suggest certain kinds of scenes, and they were much favoured by Bower and by his designer Malcolm Baker-Smith. Peggy Ashcroft volunteered herself for the role of Miranda.

On the day after the first presentation (the play was broadcast live on both 5 and 8 February), Bower wrote to the Director of Television Gerald Cock summarising the reasons for ‘the disastrous results’ (BBC WAC T5/508). Bad performances were part of this, as were ‘floor mistakes’ like a prompter standing in the foreground of a long shot and props men being visible in a superimposition. The sound balance was so poor that ‘a senior member of the Engineering Division’ who was watching at home rang up the control gallery to complain. Many of the problems, as so often at Alexandra Palace, could be accounted for by inadequate rehearsal time with the cameras in the studio. [Even so, the critic for \*The Times\* wrote that](#) ‘picture after picture of Prospero and Miranda were memorable as being beautifully placed on the screen and giving us an intimate picture of the two, *more intimate than any theatre performance can be*.’ (Anon 1939: 12; emphasis added)

Dallas Bower's interest in experimentation can also be seen in his staging of Pirandello's *Henry IV* with actors Denys Blakelock and Valerie Hobson, a play he described as 'a play of deep complexity but enormous dramatic power'.

For its really successful presentation it needs to generate an overwhelming feeling of claustrophobia and to this end I decided to produce it in a four-sided set, never before attempted on live TV. This enabled me to use complete reverses which meant that cameras 1 and 2 had to be masked from one another. Camera 1 shot through an aperture in the spy-grill of a door and camera 2 through an aperture in a *curtained* window; thus the room was without daylight and the claustrophobic effect intensified. (Bower 1986: 340; [original emphasis](#))

Bower's continual experimentation can also be recognised in his presentation of the central act of *Tristan and Isolde*. As noted above, he wrote in 'Playback' that at Alexandra Palace he concentrated on 'what I thought the Service ought certainly to attempt – Shakespeare and opera.' In this manuscript he also recalled that his mother took him to an all-Wagner concert at the Kingsway Hall just after the First World War. 'Since that time [he would have been perhaps twelve or thirteen] I had seen every Wagner production that had come my way, and I had never ceased to think of *The Ring's* film potential.' (1995: 21) One chapter of *Plan for Cinema*, indeed, is devoted to a discussion of opera and film. Only eleven days after the opening of the Alexandra Palace television service, Bower was able to present twenty-five minutes of the new opera *Pickwick*, which was composed by the conductor of that all-Wagner concert, Albert Coates. And over the next three years Bower produced many of the thirty or so BBC television opera productions (Salter 1977a: 234-39).

For Christmas 1937, Stephen Thomas mounted Thomas Arne's ballad-opera *Thomas and Sally* as a mime with actors. The actors, who did not move their lips, were on camera in Studio A at Alexandra Palace, while

the orchestra and singers were in Studio B. Bower employed a similar approach a month or so later when he mounted his production of Act II of *Tristan and Isolde*. Lasting over an hour, in the opera house this scene has next-to-no conventional 'action', and has just two singers on stage for almost its whole length. The choreographer Antony Tudor, with whom Bower worked on many occasions, staged the mime, with the actors being expected to keep their mouths shut.

Evidently, according to 'G. G. W.' in *The Listener*, Miss Oriel Ross as Isolde did exactly this, but as Tristan 'Mr Basil Bartlett compromised (seldom a wise policy in any artistic experiment) and opened and shut his mouth vaguely from time to time, producing an effect more fishlike than heroic.' The critic concluded: *Tristan* was not a success. But it was a courageous attempt, with just that touch of imagination and originality which is so easy to criticise and so hard to create.' (1938: 251)

Lionel Salter, who worked with Bower at Alexandra Palace, has written details that the camera script for *Tristan* contained as few as 36 shots in total – and this for a 64-minute production (1997b: 340). He suggests that this was 'in keeping with the dramatic character and the musical pace' of the scene, but recognises that

*Tristan* was not in fact very well received: the general public criticised it for its length and slowness, the musicians felt that the vision added little or nothing, and the popular press characterised it as a long-drawn-out 'boy and girl routine'.

Despite the very limited visual achievement of *Tristan*, there is a clear sense throughout these years that Bower was attempting to bring to television the languages and production practices of the contemporary cinema. At one of his initial BBC interviews, a mandarin said that he hoped Bower was not 'one of those René Clair fellers', to which the producer replied that 'if I thought I had as great a talent as Clair I would have occasion to be extremely pleased with myself, that in fact I

considered [him](#) to be one of the great masters of cinema' (1995: 11). As he recalls events, Bower was later able to apply lessons learned from Clair and from his other directorial mentor to the standardisation of studio production techniques.

With the practice of Clair and Hitchcock in mind, I suggested to D.H. Munro, the Productions Manager, that all productions should be designed and laid out on paper. With this Munro cordially agreed, and it became standard practice. Thus, all four camera operators became aware via a drawn layout of what would be approximately expected of them in rehearsal and during transmission. (1995: 14)

### **Agency and audience**

As the four brief case studies above demonstrate Bower was able to exercise considerable agency, both in his presentation of particular programmes and in the choice of what those programmes would be. In 'Playback' he claimed [ed](#)

[From the start] ... we were to be given our heads. I can say with all sincerity that every single production project (except one) I put forward for transmission during 1936-39 I was allowed to undertake and execute. (1995: 12)

The unrealised project, which did not proceed for reasons of its high cost, was a masque version of Berlioz's *The Damnation of Faust*.

Nor [was](#) Bower shy about making claims for his personal influence on the development of early television. In 'Playback' [he recalled](#) that he and Stephen Thomas were instrumental in the BBC's decision in February 1937 to stop alternating the use of the Baird mechanical and the EMI electrical production systems. [The limitations of the Baird system were such that both producers contemplated handing in their resignations.](#) 'To have taken such action on our part,' [he wrote](#) 'would indeed have been foolishness of the most irresponsible sort, but our pressure bore fruit. A decision was taken to scrap the Baird system entirely.' (1995: 13)

Why was Bower able to exercise such power and to enjoy such apparent creative freedom? Jan Bussell, another producer who worked at Alexandra Palace before the war, later recalled the creative atmosphere there and the change that occurred after the service returned in 1946:

[I]n the earlier days the artists' viewpoint was more often heard than now. At informal weekly meetings with the heads of television producers and designers were at liberty to air their opinions. But, with the growth of the service after the war, producers were banned from programme planning meetings. (1952: 12)

The centrality of producers in the determination of the schedule was in part a function of the modest number of television production staff at Alexandra Palace. Nor was television a major priority for BBC

management, including John Reith, during the 1930s. Its audiences, after all, were tiny when compared with radio, with perhaps 60,000-80,000 'lookers-in' in the London area able to view in 1939. But what is also clear is that Bower could continue his innovative work in part because of what he in several places calls 'appreciative audiences' and, for *Julius Caesar*, 'an excellent press'. Recollecting the production in 'Playback' sixty years on, Bower also wrote, 'what was really more important than any of these things [by which he means press and publicity], it had an appreciative audience' (1995: 18).

Yet it is exceptionally hard to know if – and certainly how -- Bower and his superiors judged this appreciation beyond, perhaps, the comments of those they met at dinner parties. In the BBC Written Archives Centre at Caversham there exist only two general audience research reports for pre-war television and seemingly none for individual programmes. The first general report, *Viewers and the Television Service*, dated 5 February 1937, investigated the opinions of just 118 lookers-in who had replied to a posted questionnaire, but it contained no discussions of individual programmes (BBC: 1937). Nor are there such in the second, *An Enquiry into the Viewers' Opinions on Television Programmes*, dated 26 June



1939, which was based on 3,971 questionnaires. The report uses this evidence to determine that 'Continental Feature Films' are viewers' second least favourite type of programme, being only marginally more popular than 'Musical Features' (BBC: 1939).

The responses of the audience, however, were of only moderate concern to Bower and his colleagues. Far more importantly, his interests aligned closely with the Reithian paternalism that dominated the BBC's broadcasting in the inter-war years. John Reith, Managing Director General of the British Broadcasting Company from 1923 to 1926, and the first Director General of the British Broadcasting Corporation from 1927 to 1938 had detailed the broad principles of this guiding ethos in his memorandum to the Crawford Committee in 1925 (Reith 1925). Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff have provided a useful précis of this document.

Broadcasting had a responsibility to bring into the greatest possible number of homes in the fullest degree all that was best in every department of human knowledge, endeavour and achievement... Broadcasting had an educative role and the broadcasters had developed contacts with the great educational movements and institutions of the day in order to develop the use of the medium of radio to foster the spread of knowledge. (1991: 7)

Reith's concerns remained consistent across more than two decades, as is evidenced by a quotation from his 1949 autobiography *Into the Wind* by which time he had long since left the BBC:

It is not insistent autocracy but wisdom that suggests a policy of broadcasting carefully and persistently on the basis of giving people what one believes they should like *and will come to like*... The supply of good things will create the demand for more. (1949: 74, emphasis added)

Bower's 1936 *Plan for Cinema* is in many ways a visionary book foreseeing how colour, widescreen and 3D might be used to create a new form of filmic poetic drama. But it also betrays similar – and perhaps particularly in the mid 1930s, problematic – Reithian attitudes towards the audience.

'Giving the public what it wants' dies hard, but at last the idiotic phrase is being appreciated for the illusion it is. You nor I, nor anyone knows what the public wants. And least of all does the public know itself. If we give it something a little better than that which it liked last time, we shall at once have served better the public and ourselves. And the public in return will serve us by acclaiming the success of our policy. For the quintessence of success is to lead. And the great bellowing, inarticulate masses... are never happier than when someone is showing them firmly which way they are to go. (1936: 146)

Television permitted Bower to aspire to lead those 'bellowing, inarticulate masses' because during these years it was a marginal monopoly entirely divorced from the forces of the market. Nor was he at all interested in or diverted by the shifts in taste and understanding that, in the words of D.L. LeMahieu, 'began to modify some of the assumptions and attitudes that buttressed Reith's cultural missions' (1988: 59). Bower's work in these years reasserts the traditional cultural hierarchy of low and high and demonstrates precious little interest in the developing 'common' culture, whose emergence in the 1930s LeMahieu has detailed so elegantly in his book *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain Between the Wars*.

At the same time Bower was working with a modern technology of (potentially, and as it turned out) mass communication which had yet to achieve, if it ever has, social and cultural respectability. His commitment to Shakespeare, to Pirandello and to Wagner might be seen as an attempt to co-opt the grand European cultural tradition to assist this new medium in

achieving just this legitimacy. Despite, or perhaps precisely because of, the fact that only tangential fragments remain of Dallas Bower's attempts to translate this tradition into grey and fuzzy and flickering electronic images on a 10" screen, the man and his mission remain fascinating.

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