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Edited by George W. Brandt

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Notes on the contributors

JOHN ADAMS is Director of Film and Television Studies in the Drama Department of the University of Bristol, where he has taught since 1979. He has special interests in a range of cross-disciplinary approaches to the subject and to the development of practical studies. He has worked professionally as a writer, director and producer, and publishes and broadcasts on media issues.

ELIZABETH BIRD, the Head of the Department for Continuing Education at the University of Bristol, has taught many courses on film and media studies. A member of the editorial collective which produced *Half the Sky* (Virago, 1979), she presently co-ordinates the MSc in Gender & Social Policy at Bristol University. She has published in the field of cultural studies and on women returning to the labour market.

GEORGE BRANDT, Professor Emeritus in Radio, Film and Television Studies in the Drama Department of the University of Bristol, worked for the National Film Board of Canada before becoming a university teacher in 1951. He created the first practical postgraduate media course at a British university and regularly produced student-made TV documentaries for the BBC from 1970 to 1986. He edited *British Television Drama* (Cambridge University Press, 1981) and *German and Dutch Theatre, 1600–1848* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), translated plays from German and Spanish, and contributed essays to several dictionaries of the theatre as well as articles to theatre and media publications. He has taught in the Netherlands as well as Japan.

PAUL CLEMENTS is Director of the School of Drama at the Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff. He trained and worked as a teacher in Birmingham before joining the staff of the Midlands Arts Centre. He was one of the founder directors of the Contact Theatre Company in

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Manchester and has taught drama at the University of British Columbia and at Simon Fraser University in Canada.

JO ELIOT originally trained as a drama teacher; after teaching in inner-city primary schools and lecturing in Drama at St Martin's College, Lancaster, she took an M. Ed. at Bristol University. Now a Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of the West of England at Bristol, she helped to develop the interdisciplinary MA in Women's Studies in 1991. She has also been involved with the Open University's Women's Studies programmes since their inception.

VERA GOTTLIEB is Professor of Drama at Goldsmiths' College, University of London, and co-director of a theatre company, Magna Carta Productions. Publications include *Chekhov and the Vaudeville* (Cambridge University Press, 1982), *Chekhov in Performance in Russia and Soviet Russia* (Chadwyck-Healey, 1984), as well as articles for *Themes in Drama*, *New Theatre Quarterly* and other periodicals. Translator, adaptor and director of *A Chekhov Quartet* (performed in London, Yalta and Moscow, 1987). Directed *Red Earth* (1985) and *Waterloo Road* (Young Vic Studio, 1987).

HUGH HEBERT is a television critic and feature writer for *The Guardian*, where he worked mainly on profiles and coverage of the arts and publishing before the expansion of small-screen output took over most of his time. He has also written extensively on the social services, and before joining *The Guardian* he was on the staff of *The Times* and *The Financial Times*.

JOOST HUNNINGHER is Principal Lecturer in Film and Television Production at the University of Westminster (formerly the Polytechnic of Central London) and course leader of the BA (Hons) Course in Film, Video and Photographic Arts and of the Joint Board for Film Industry Training courses. He has a wide range of professional production experience as a producer, director, writer, lighting cameraman and editor. Film credits include *Playing*, *Play Music*, *Turning South*, *Days of the Commune* (for the Royal Shakespeare Company), and *Settling Scores*. Theatre work includes directing plays for the Soho Poly Theatre.

ALBERT HUNT was born in Burnley, went to Balliol, and has been based in West Yorkshire since 1965. He has written widely about theatre and popular entertainment. Work with the Bradford Art College Theatre Group included *John Ford's Cuban Missile Crisis* and *The Destruction of Dresden*. Television documentaries include *Spring Fever in Melbourne* (about Australian Rules football), *Pakistan in Yorkshire* and *From Learie to Viv* (both about cricket in the North of England). Currently involved with work in Poland, Derry, and the West Yorkshire Playhouse.

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ANDREW LAVENDER lectures part-time at Goldsmiths' College, University of London, on Television, Film and Theatre, and takes seminar courses on British Television, Film and Theatre at Birkbeck College for the British Universities Summer Schools programme. Formerly the editor of *City Limits*, he writes on arts and the media for publications including *The Guardian*, *New Statesman and Society* and *The Times*.

BOB MILLINGTON lectures in Drama, Film and Television in the School of Community Studies at the Liverpool John Moores University. Together with Robin Nelson he was responsible for the book on the production of *Boys from the Blackstuff*, based largely on interviews with the writer, director and BBC production staff. His current interests include community theatre, video production practice and images of Liverpool in contemporary culture.

GEOFFREY REEVES has directed plays at the National, for the Royal Shakespeare Company, at the Royal Court and the Sunderland Empire, as well as in Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, Portugal, France, Israel, the United States and Japan. He has run theatres in Exeter, Nottingham and Atlanta, Georgia, has taught drama at universities in Stanford, Warwick and St Etienne, and currently works at LAMDA and the National Film and Television School.

DAVID ROSE has been in television since 1954, when he joined the BBC, becoming the Head of Television Training in 1969 and working as Head of Regional Television Drama from 1971 to 1981. When Channel 4 was founded he became the Senior Commissioning Editor for Fiction, continuing in this post until 1990. Numerous awards include the Prix Italia, 1959, several BAFTA awards, the Prix Rossellini, 1987, and the RTS Gold Medal, 1988.

RICHARD SPARKS teaches Criminology at Keele University. He has previously worked at the University of Cambridge and for the Open University. Outside his work on crime and mass media his academic interests are mainly in the sociology of imprisonment. Recent publications include *Imprisonment: European Perspectives* (editor with John Muncie, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991) and *Television and the Drama of Crime* (Open University Press, 1992).

Foreword

DAVID ROSE

The eighties saw perhaps the most radical changes in British television drama since the advent of colour and the ability to record and edit tape. These changes, combined with the fact that television audiences engage in their millions nightly to enjoy drama, make this book both timely and welcome. The period starts with the most influential event of the decade – the setting in motion of a new channel in 1980 which was to come ‘on air’ in 1982: Channel 4.

Amid the flurry of new recording and editing technology the ‘single camera’ operation had the greatest impact on drama. This saw the demise of multi-camera studio production which had allowed the actor to perform scenes lasting minutes at a time. The vision mixer became superfluous, short filmic takes were in. The writers – and all drama starts with them – were able to think in terms of cinema. Scripts became screenplays. *Play for Today* and *Thirty Minute Theatre* became *Film on Four* and *Screen One* and *Two*.

The addition of satellite and cable to the existing four channels, the uncertainty caused by the new commercial franchises and the coming debate over the BBC Charter all heightened the ratings war. It became a schedulers’ heyday. Their strong cards were ‘soaps’: twice-weekly – later extended to thrice-weekly – serials with omnibus repeats were in demand. In fulfilling its remit and seeking a 10 per cent share of the audience, Channel 4 anticipated small audiences for its programmes. It needed its soap: *Brookside*, from the first night on air, delivering a satisfactory audience rating throughout the eighties. ITV’s *The Bill* and the BBC’s *EastEnders* followed, together with overseas acquisitions like *Neighbours*. These additional hours were mainly at the expense of the television play. The demise of the single play was hotly debated and in my view so much hot

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air. Plays were still produced – but they came in two, three, four and six episodes.

One of the many requirements of the Broadcasting Act which brought Channel 4 into being was the engagement of ‘a substantial number of independent film and programme-makers’. Among the many benefits this brought was the opportunity to establish a partnership with the old enemy, cinema. Work originated by television could now be released theatrically before television transmission. With feature films this brought serious consideration by film critics, recognition at film festivals in the five continents – and subsequent sales opportunities. The free passage of writers, directors and technicians between the two industries was both welcome and healthy.

The closer ties with Europe have already signalled benefits – and dangers. Co-production is essential for the survival of broadcast drama. But quality will only be maintained in Europe by a generous editorial approach recognising and respecting language – and the many diverse and rich cultures that make up our dramatic traditions.

Acknowledgements

As tends to be the case in a work by various hands, what appears between the covers of the book is merely the tip of the iceberg. Not only has there been a long and I trust mutually stimulating prior exchange of ideas between the editor and the writers of the various essays in the volume: a great many people outside the enterprise itself, including some of the authors of the plays under discussion, have made vital (though not always immediately visible) contributions to it.

I have been helped in writing the Introduction by the information and advice given me by, among others, Richard MacDonnell, for many years a Regional Officer of the IBA; by Barrie MacDonald, Head of the ITC Library; by Charles Elton, of First Choice, and Archie Tait, Head of Development of Zenith Productions Limited, as well as by Tim Preece, actor and playwright. For all the help, counsel and support received by the various contributors to the volume in preparing the essays collected here, I should like to express sincere thanks on their behalf and join my appreciation to theirs. Albert Hunt was given a most illuminating interview by Alan Bennett. Vera Gottlieb was supplied by London Weekend Television, through the good offices of Michael Small, with the post-production script of the *South Bank Show* of 13 April 1986: *Brookside* (edited and presented by Melvyn Bragg, produced and directed by Jill Freeman) and given permission by Mr Bragg to quote from it; she was also supplied with the script of *Brookside Episode 355* by Merseyside Television, through the good offices of Philip Reeve, Head of Corporate Affairs, and Ian Vasey, *Brookside* Location Manager. John Adams was granted an interview by Sir Antony Jay and obtained some additional insights into *Yes, Prime Minister* from correspondence with Jonathan Lynn and from information supplied by BBC Enterprises. Geoffrey Reeves had a long and productive interview with Charles Wood and had additional information

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Much of the quality of *British Television Drama in the Eighties* is due not only to the actual panel of contributors but also the less visible informants listed above. The book's shortcomings, on the other hand, are entirely in the editor's court – who, if he has inadvertently overlooked anybody or any institution that has helped it on its way, craves their forgiveness in advance.

G.W.B.