

Play for Today and Northern Ireland in the 1970s

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Abstract

This article sets out to explain the factors influencing the making of Plays for Today about Northern Ireland during the 1970s and how these partly account for the characteristics of the work that was produced. The discussion initially identifies the problems posed by filming in Northern Ireland and the managerial scrutiny to which plays dealing with the ‘troubles’ – such as *Carson Country* and *The Legion Hall Bombing* - were subject. It then goes on to examine how these factors encouraged the ‘oblique’ artistic strategies evident in *Taking Leave* and *Your Man from Six Counties* and the more self-reflexive and anti-naturalist approach adopted by *Come the Revolution*, *Catchpenny Twist* and *The Last Window Cleaner*. In doing so, the article aims to retrieve a largely ‘forgotten’ period of television drama production and add to our understanding of how television drama first tackled the contemporary Northern Ireland ‘troubles’.

Keywords: Play for Today; BBC; Northern Ireland; the ‘troubles’; censorship; controversy; forgotten television drama.

Introduction

The history of television drama and Northern Ireland in the 1970s has been largely neglected. This is due in part to the relatively low number of works about Northern Ireland produced as well as the difficulty of viewing them. However, it also results from the perception that those plays that did get made commanded little interest. Such a view may be traced back to Richard Hoggart’s contribution to London Weekend Television’s arts programme, *The South Bank Show* (ITV, 24 February 1980) and his accompanying feature in the *Listener*. For Hoggart,

the problem of Northern Ireland plays was not simply their low number but also their lack of artistic achievement; the 1970s dramas, he argued, failed to grapple seriously with the ‘troubles’, making use of ‘stock characters and stock attitudes’ and relying upon ‘recurring types of cop-out’ (1980: 261). Hoggart’s dismissal of the plays of this period has since solidified into received wisdom, with subsequent writers such as McIlroy (1998) and Braun (2000) generally content to accept its validity. This view has also had a knock-on effect for our understanding of *Play for Today*, insofar as the series was responsible for a relatively high proportion of the plays dealing with Northern Ireland made during this period. The official historian of BBC Northern Ireland, Jonathan Bardon, for example, simply accepts that the very first *Play for Today* to be set in Ireland, *Carson Country* (23 October 1972) ‘was an extremely bad play’ without providing any evidence of having actually watched it (2000: 101).¹

However, while it is the case that the number of plays made about Northern Ireland during the 1970s was relatively small, it is much less clear that they deserve such critical neglect. Given the political situation in Northern Ireland, television writers, producers and directors faced the challenge of how to portray and dramatised the experiences of a society enveloped in violent conflict. They also faced considerable difficulties getting work made, given the restrictions imposed upon them by the broadcasting institutions. In this sense, the period may be seen to have been an experimental one in which different modes of representing the ‘troubles’ were tested out – both artistically and in relation to the constraints governing television production at the time. The discussion that follows, therefore, sets out to explain the factors influencing the making of *Plays for Today* about the North of Ireland during the 1970s and how these partly account for the types of work that were made. It is evident from Hoggart’s account that he held a preference for well-observed realist drama of the kind historically associated with both the *Wednesday Play* and *Play for Today*. However,

what is striking about the early Plays for Today that deal with Northern Ireland is how many depart from this realist tradition or inhabit it in unorthodox ways. The article proposes, therefore, that the work is better understood through a different analytical prism that not only recognises the generically-mixed and formally self-conscious characteristics of the plays but also identifies how such features constituted a form of response to – or implicit negotiation of – the obstacles then facing the production of plays about Northern Ireland. In making this argument, the discussion will initially outline the problems posed by filming in Northern Ireland and the managerial scrutiny to which plays dealing with the conflict were subject. It will then indicate how this led to work which adopted oblique or reflexive artistic strategies. In doing so, it aims to retrieve a largely ‘forgotten’ period of television drama production and add to our understanding of how television drama first tackled the ‘troubles’.

Local production: *The Dandelion Clock*

Play for Today was, of course, important for the way it sought to create drama that dealt with ‘life outside London’ (BBC 1972: 59). The opening of a new television studio at Pebble Mill in Birmingham in 1971, and the appointment of David Rose as Head of English Regions Drama, encouraged a growing range of material from and about the English regions. BBC Scotland, which had a history of producing drama stretching back to the 1950s, also found a route to the network through Play for Today from the mid-1970s onwards. By comparison, BBC Northern Ireland had very little experience of producing television drama and had been responsible for only a handful of 30-minute plays involving a small number of actors and sets. This meant that initially all of the Plays for Today dealing with Northern Ireland were commissioned from London rather than Belfast. While this was also the case with Scotland, the political situation in Northern Ireland posed specific problems, particularly if the

production involved location shooting or the use of local facilities and personnel. This was vividly illustrated in the case of the very first Play for Today to be set in contemporary Northern Ireland: *The Dandelion Clock* (1 May 1975).

This was written by the Belfast writer Wilson John Haire whose stage play *Within Two Shadows* (1972), about a 'mixed' Protestant-Catholic family, caught the attention of Play for Today's producers. An early commission for the series failed to materialise but a second, initially untitled, script was commissioned in 1973. This became *The Dandelion Clock*, a play about a Belfast Protestant family 'not directly participating in the bombing and disturbances but trying to continue ordinary lives' which, it was planned, should 'be recorded on location in Belfast'.² This idea also had the support of BBC Northern Ireland who wanted the play's transmission to coincide with the station's 50th anniversary in 1974.³ The intention was to shoot - on both film and video - in Belfast during June 1974, but by March it had become clear that the project was running into difficulties due to concerns about the situation in Northern Ireland and the safety of staff. Given BBC Northern Ireland's lack of experience of drama production, the bulk of those involved would have to travel from England and many were unwilling to do so (especially members of the Design and Costume departments and film and OB operatives).⁴ The onset of the Ulster Workers' Council strike in May further underlined the problems of mounting the production in Belfast and the Head of Plays, Christopher Morahan, proposed a delay until later in the year.⁵ This, too, proved a forlorn hope and, in the wake of another postponement, it was decided to abandon the idea of shooting on location and commission Haire to re-write the play for the studio. This meant that the play was then finally recorded in London in March 1975, with the occasional use of photographic stills of Belfast the only nod to the production's original conception.⁶ In large part due to the determination of producer Ken Trodd, it did subsequently prove possible for two Plays for Today, *Catchpenny Twist* (5 December 1977) and *The Last Window Cleaner*

(13 February 1979), to be shot partly in Belfast some years later but, for most of the decade, Northern Ireland, unlike elsewhere in the UK, remained a 'no-go' area.

Controversy and censorship: *Carson Country* and *The Legion Hall Bombing*

However, the obstacles to production in the North were not only logistical. The despatch of British troops to Northern Ireland in 1969, the resurgence of the (Provisional) IRA in 1970 and the imposition of direct rule from Westminster in 1972 had made television coverage of the 'troubles' a matter of acute sensitivity. This led to pressure on the broadcasters to engage in close internal scrutiny of programmes about Northern Ireland, employ procedures of 'advance warning' and 'reference upwards' and, in certain cases, cut or ban material that was held to be too controversial. Although this situation impacted upon news and current affairs most directly, it also extended to drama, particularly when it involved a relationship to real people or events (though not exclusively so). The effects of these procedures may be seen in the case of the first Play for Today to tackle Irish subject-matter, *Carson Country* (1972), which almost immediately ran into trouble and subsequently became subject to cuts and a delay in transmission.

The play was written by the Irish writer and singer, Dominic Behan, the younger brother of the rather better-known Brendan Behan. Despite Play for Today's reputation for contemporary dramas, this was unusual in being a historical work, focusing on the opposition of unionists, led by Lord Edward Carson, to Home Rule prior to the First World War. It was, however, noted in the commissioning brief that the drama would deal with '[o]ne of the main sources for today's tensions' and was therefore understood to involve an exploration of the historical roots and possible parallels with the contemporary situation.⁷ In line with Behan's socialist politics, however, the play was less concerned with Carson himself than the role his

ideas and actions played in fomenting sectarian division between working-class Protestants and Catholics. Commissioned in May 1971, and recorded in February of the following year, the play was ready for transmission in April 1972. However, even before the recording occurred, the play was discussed at a meeting of the Board of Governors at which the Director General, Charles Curran, indicated that '[i]n view of the subject matter and of Mr. Behan's past association with Irish Republicanism', he had asked the Director of Programmes for Television, David Attenborough, in consultation with the Controller, Northern Ireland, Waldo Maguire, 'to take a decision as to whether the programme should be broadcast, if necessary in consultation with himself'.⁸

This led to Attenborough, along with the Controller of BBC 1 and Ronnie Mason, Head of Programmes, Northern Ireland, viewing the programme in April. Their conclusion was that 'it should not be transmitted in the immediate future because of the current situation in Northern Ireland and the onset of so many marches and parades'.⁹ BBC Northern Ireland News Editor, Martin Wallace, and Assistant Head of Programmes, Cecil Taylor, were then recruited to read the script for historical accuracy and a sequence involving an induction ceremony into the Protestant and loyalist Orange Order, which bitterly opposed Home Rule, was 'substantially cut'.¹⁰ Some six months later, Attenborough concluded that the play was now suitable for transmission though his hand was in part forced by the impending transmission on ITV of another play by Behan, set in contemporary Belfast, *The Folk Singer* (Thames, 7 November 1972). As he explained, in a memo to Charles Curran, he sought to show *Carson Country* first, 'if only to avoid the criticism that we had held it up until Independent Television had courageously tested the water for us'.¹¹ Although the Director General backed this decision, he was still sufficiently nervous to take the precaution of writing to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, William Whitelaw, to provide him with

‘advance warning’ of the play’s transmission and to explain the management’s view that ‘to suppress the play entirely’ would lead to more ‘adverse comment’ than to show it.¹²

The sensitivities surrounding Northern Ireland subject-matter were further demonstrated by the case of *The Legion Hall Bombing* (22 August 1978), a dramatisation of the jury-less ‘Diplock’ trial of Willie Gallagher who had been sentenced to twelve years’ imprisonment for the bombing of the British Legion Hall in Strabane in 1975. The playwright Caryl Churchill had acquired a transcript of the trial (which had been held ‘in camera’) and, when a planned Play for Today slot fell vacant, the producer Margaret Matheson had commissioned her to edit and adapt the transcript (under the title of ‘Willie’). The matter was immediately referred upwards by the Head of Plays, James Cellan-Jones, and, a few days before the programme was due to be recorded in February 1978, the Director General, Ian Trethowan, wrote to the Managing Director of Television, Alasdair Milne and Director of News and Current Affairs, Dick Francis, to express his concerns regarding ‘the dramatisation of a case which apparently is regarded by opponents of the [Diplock Courts] system as its weakest point so far’. He was fearful that the selection of this particular case would be regarded as a ‘political judgement’ which loaded ‘the scales against the system’.¹³ He, therefore, made it clear that, although the recording of the play could proceed, the decision if and when to transmit it was yet to be made and would require the Northern Ireland Office to be informed.

Colleagues at BBC Northern Ireland were also consulted on the matter and Cecil Taylor, now BBC Northern Ireland’s Head of Programmes, who had previously opposed the transmission of *Carson Country*, attended programme rehearsals in London as well as the recording in Glasgow. He was particularly vexed by the recording of a commentary, introducing the play and linking sequences which he regarded as ‘totally unacceptable’ and was supported in this by the Northern Ireland Controller, James Hawthorne.¹⁴ A decision to

delay transmission of the programme then followed on the grounds that it would be 'irresponsible' for the BBC to broadcast the programme at a time of 'mounting tension' within the region.¹⁵ This delay stretched into the summer when disputes over the play's use of additional commentary, rather than the actual dramatisation of the trial, continued. While the original voice-over recorded in February was re-written and reduced to an opening voice-over and epilogue, the BBC management remained unhappy and insisted upon a re-written version of the introduction (prepared by Hawthorne) and the elimination of the epilogue. These changes involved, inter alia, the removal of references to internment without trial, trials for 'political offences', confessions obtained by 'threats or force' and 'unsigned statements put forward by the police with no corroborative evidence'.¹⁶ Churchill, however, considered these passages to be 'essential' to 'the structure of the piece' and in breach of her contract and both she and the play's director Roland Joffe removed their names from the credits.¹⁷ The play was then finally broadcast, several months later than originally planned, on 22 August 1978 when it was aired at the unusually late time of 10.25 pm.

The capacity of Play for Today to push back boundaries and provoke controversy has, of course, been an important element of its reputation. Indeed, producer Margaret Matheson launched the 1977-8 season that was to include *The Legion Hall Bombing* with the declaration that 'almost by definition the plays will be nothing if not controversial'.¹⁸ This was certainly the case with *Scum*, a play also produced by Matheson and planned for the same season but refused a transmission altogether on the grounds of its 'degree of violence', questionable 'accuracy' and supposed provision of a 'documentary.... about Borstals' in 'the guise of a play'.¹⁹ Plays about Northern Ireland were, therefore, not alone in generating managerial interference but the treatment of them did exhibit some special features. As the example of *Scum* indicates, the grounds for managerial intervention varied and ranged across issues such as the use of violence and bad language (for example *Gotcha*, 12 April 1977),

‘explicit sexuality’ (for example *Do As I Say*, 25 January 1977) and ‘blasphemy’ (Dennis Potter’s *Brimstone and Treacle* which, like *Scum*, was also banned). In the case of *Carson Country* and *The Legion Hall Bombing* the objections to the plays were partly linked to more general concerns about what was referred to as overtly ‘political’ or ‘committed drama’. These initially arose in relation to the Wednesday Play (and *The Big Flame*, 19 February 1969, in particular) but resurfaced in the 1974-5 period when a series of left-wing Plays for Today – *All Good Men* (31 January 1974) *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* (6 June 1974) and *Leeds United!* (31 October 1974) – were followed by the transmission of the four-part *Days of Hope* (itself subsequently repeated as a Play for Today) (Hill 2011: 145-56). The two Northern Ireland cases may also be related to the recurring worries within the BBC about the propriety of mixing documentary and drama (and by implication fact and fiction). These too were concerns that extended back to the 1960s but which had also re-emerged with the appearance of Plays for Today such as *The Rank and File* (20 May 1971), *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* and, as noted, *Scum*. Indeed, the issues of political ‘bias’ and the mixing of documentary and drama were, in many cases, regarded as inter-related insofar as BBC managers suspected that drama might be providing the means to circumvent the normal constraints - and expectations of ‘impartiality’ – governing the making of documentaries and other factual programmes. To this extent, it is significant that both *Carson Country* and *The Legion Hall Bombing* were referred to colleagues in News and Current Affairs who sought not only to reduce their ‘partiality’ but to enhance their ‘documentary’ status by adding explanatory archival footage and commentary in the case of *Carson Country* and avoiding the use of assumed names in *The Legion Hall Bombing*.

The involvement of personnel associated with News and Current Affairs also accounts for the particular emphasis placed on the possible impact of plays dealing with Northern Ireland. In his discussion of Northern Ireland news reporting, Philip Schlesinger

identifies the significance of a managerial approach which, he argues, is ‘especially sensitive’ to the possible ‘inflammatory effects of broadcasting’ and its presumed capacity to provoke public disturbance (1978: 223). As with arguments about ‘impartiality’, this ‘public order approach’ involved the application of criteria to drama more commonly associated with news and documentary and extended beyond the scrutiny of just content. The delay in transmission of *Carson Country*, for example, was in large part justified on the basis of the passions it could arouse amongst Protestants in the run-up to the Orange parades of 12 July. It was also considered particularly insensitive to broadcast *The Legion Hall Bombing* in the wake of the notorious Le Mon restaurant bombing (in February 1978) as well as prudent to continue to delay its transmission until the summer marching season had ended. But, while these judgements regarding timing and impact were regularly made, there was often little evidence to justify them. Some fifty telephone calls, mostly hostile, were received at Broadcasting House following the screening of *Carson Country*.²⁰ However, there was no indication of any wider form of protest or social disturbance and some viewers had even called in to praise the courage of the BBC in showing the play. In the case of *The Legion Hall Bombing*, duty officers and public relations staff stayed on late but reported ‘only three telephone calls, two of them incoherent’.²¹ While it might be argued that this lack of reaction demonstrated how the cuts and delays had proved effective, it is also the case that such warnings of the dangers of transmitting individual dramas were characteristically exaggerated and themselves had the consequence of constraining the range and outlook of what was shown.

This also placed BBC Northern Ireland in an unusual position. As has been noted, senior personnel within BBC Northern played a key role in scrutinising and commenting on material for which the station was not itself responsible. This process of referral was not simply a matter of courtesy, however, but a long-established policy, enshrined in official directives, whereby it was expected that the Northern Ireland Controller, or other senior

member of staff, would be consulted over 'any programme which deals with questions directly affecting Northern Ireland'.²² It was this policy of referral that had previously led to BBC Northern Ireland blocking the transmission of Sam Thompson's political satire *Cemented with Love* in 1964 on the grounds that it would be regarded by local audiences as an 'insult' and would contribute to the worsening of Northern Ireland's political and social climate.²³ Occurring prior to the eruption of the 'troubles', when BBC Northern Ireland was closely linked to the Unionist establishment, these objections not only proved groundless once the play was eventually shown (following Thompson's death) but appeared tantamount to political censorship. While the situation within both Northern Ireland and the BBC had changed by the 1970s, the station's potential veto over programmes produced within other parts of the BBC sat uneasily with the types of socially-questioning drama with which a series such as *Play for Today* was associated.²⁴ Thus, while BBC Northern Ireland was keen, as the example of *The Dandelion Clock* indicates, to become more involved in drama production, its actions in relation to other *Plays for Today* indicated a hyper-sensitivity about their capacity to offend and an inclination to restrict, as much as extend, the range of contemporary plays about the Northern Irish situation.

It is, of course, this process of reference upwards and extended consultation that partly explains the scarcity of television drama about Northern Ireland during the 1970s. As Hoggart suggested, the scrutiny accorded plays about Northern Ireland could act as a deterrent to - or encourage a form of 'self-censorship' for - writers who wanted to avoid the delays and 'fine tooth-combing' over their work to which they might become subject (1980: 261). Indeed, this argument might not just explain the small number of productions but some of the characteristics of the plays themselves to the extent that they may have helped to minimise or circumvent managerial scrutiny. Two types of work might be said to fall into this category. There are those that are mainly about something else and only address the

‘troubles’ obliquely; there are also those that confront the ‘troubles’ more directly but self-consciously distance themselves from the conventions of documentary and realism (thereby removing themselves from the orbit of news and current affairs). The ensuing argument develops this argument by focusing on the ‘oblique’ strategies of *Taking Leave* and *Your Man from Six Counties* before going on to assess the more self-reflexive and anti-naturalist Plays for Today *Come the Revolution*, *Catchpenny Twist* and *The Last Window Cleaner*. In both sets of examples, it is argued, that the use of such strategies provides the opportunity to challenge conventional discourses about the ‘troubles’ but also runs the risk of puzzling or disorienting viewers in ways that can end up confirming, as much as subverting, pre-existing conceptions of the conflict.

Oblique strategies: *Taking Leave* and *Your Man from Six Counties*

Taking Leave (28 November 1974), the only television play by newcomer Joyce Neary, was the first Play for Today to allude to the contemporary (as opposed to historical) situation in Northern Ireland. Its Irish elements led to the generation of an ‘Early Warning Synopsis’ and the play was later added to a list of ‘political’ plays prepared for the BBC Board of Governors.²⁵ However insofar as it was focused primarily upon the inner workings of a dysfunctional family, its political dimensions were generally regarded to be relatively slim. For the Irish journalist and filmmaker, Peter Lennon, the contemporary critic most alert to the play’s Irish dimensions, the incorporation of ‘the Northern Ireland problem’ provided little more than some ‘additional dramatic material’ (1974: 37). However, while *Taking Leave* certainly takes an excruciatingly painful look at family life, its concern with the North of Ireland is more tightly interwoven into the play than this would imply. The play’s title derives from the short period of leave taken by Mike (George Sweeney), a young sergeant in

the British Army who returns from Belfast to his family home in London. The members of his family are all keen that he should not sign on for another term and the play includes a series of flashbacks that reveal some of his experiences while on tour of duty in Northern Ireland. These include a scene in which he shoots, in a moment of panic, a – possibly unarmed - suspect whose car has been stopped at an army road block. In this respect, the play anticipates a number of dramas dealing with the experiences of British soldiers in Northern Ireland such as Wilson John Haire's *Letter from a Soldier* (BBC2, 27 February 1975), *The Vanishing Army* (BBC2, 29 November 1978), subsequently repeated as a Play for Today, and the Play for Today *Chance of a Lifetime* (3 January 1980). Although, none of these demonstrate any particular interest in the politics of the conflict per se, all highlight the high cost to the men concerned and the negative consequences for their families back home. What is unusual about *Taking Leave*, however, is that Mike chooses to go back to Northern Ireland, in spite of the dangers to which the job exposes both himself and those with whom he comes into contact. As such, the play seeks to exploit the irony that the 'troubles' in Northern Ireland may actually be preferable for Mike to the troubles to be found inside the family home. Indeed, his sister Nonie (Alison Steadman) accuses him of being 'a deserter' and a 'coward', not for 'running away' from the army but for leaving his family and home.

This means that the play's account of family life is especially bleak, itself constituting a 'war zone' in which paternal violence and abuse, maternal neglect and incestuous desires occur within a seemingly 'respectable' and 'normal' household (and in which the parents are simply referred to in the credits as 'Father' and 'Mother'). In line with the play's subject-matter (and the constraints governing television of the time), the play itself exhibits gaps and unexplained shifts indicative of the trauma and repressions that are difficult to bring into the open and address explicitly. Thus, while the family drama is powerful and disturbing in its own right, its rootedness in the unsaid (and possibly unsayable) not only hints at the hidden

injuries of family life but the political dynamics involved in the relation between Britain and Northern Ireland as well. The Irish elements of the play, in this regard, are not confined to the flashbacks showing Mike's activities in Northern Ireland but are interwoven into the fabric of the family's own experiences. The mother is from southern Ireland and is married to an English patriarch who disparagingly remarks that she might have married 'a Paddy and lived in one room up Kilburn'. The children also appear to have grown up within a culture infused with Irish nationalism. The disturbed but rebellious Nonie is heard to sing 'The Merry Ploughboy' (also known as 'Off to Dublin in the green'), a song celebrating the fight for Irish independence (and originally recorded by Dominic Behan for his *Easter Week and After: Songs of the IRA* in 1959). Mike also listens to a record of the Clancy Brothers' 1963 concert at Carnegie Hall in which the group recall a childhood 'carol' about the devil joining the British army and engaging in violent, limb-removing combat with the Irish. These are clearly deliberate markers of Irish nationalist sentiment but are difficult to explain in psychological terms. Despite his background, Mike appears to have few qualms about serving in Ireland and fighting on behalf of the British army (though the psychic scars left by his experiences may be one of the things the play leaves unsaid). However, the antagonisms within the family and the desire of Mike and Nonie to break free from their domineering and abusive father also suggest a parallelism between the power relations prevailing within the family and those between Britain and the North of Ireland. Nonie refers to 'resisting' her father's will and, at the play's end, there's an intimation of possible parricide when the father falls to his death from a ladder. This then provides the family members with a degree of 'freedom' from his dominating presence that is both literal and potentially metaphorical. However, in a work that avoids explicit meanings there is also a sense – as Mike prepares to return to the army and Nonie prepares to move to Glasgow - that the past cannot be so easily overcome, a sentiment underscored by the play's intermittent use on the soundtrack of the fatalistic ballad

'Barbara Allen' (and its tale of doomed love). Although the metaphorical dimensions of the play are therefore inexact, the play is still highly unsettling in the way in which it simultaneously addresses both family abuse and military conflict while avoiding the level of explicitness that might have made it impossible to transmit.

A mix of family drama and politics may also be found in Colin Welland's *Your Man from Six Counties* (26 October 1976). As in *Taking Leave*, there are only fleeting shots of Belfast and the play was filmed almost completely in the Republic of Ireland in County Sligo (where Welland had family connections through his wife). The story focuses on the fate of a young Catholic boy Jimmy (Joseph Reynolds) whose father has been killed in a bomb explosion in Belfast and has come to live with his Uncle Danny's (Donal McCann) family. Jimmy is traumatised by his loss and is prone to nightmares and outbursts of anger. In a play attracted to both romanticism and symbolism, Jimmy is zealously protective of a pet rook that he keeps close by him (and which is clearly to be linked to his uncle's comments that crows in 'old Irish' mythology are regarded as 'lost, tormented souls').²⁶ As such, the play's main concern becomes the battle over Jimmy's 'soul', his psychic rehabilitation and restoration to a proper 'life'. This is, in large part, accomplished through the healing powers of the family which, in contrast to the divided and abusive family of *Taking Leave*, comes to stand in for a more positive imagining of Irish 'national community'.

In pursuing its main theme, the play positions Jimmy between two different adult responses to his predicament. His Uncle Danny is a kindly, humane man who rejects both public-house patriotism and the authority of the Catholic church. He is contrasted with a schoolboy friend of Jimmy's father, Pat (Paul Antrim), who is not only religiously devout but seeks to instil in Jimmy a sense of Irish 'patriotism' based on desire for revenge for his father's 'martyrdom' (even though Danny denies his brother was ever involved in active service). This conflict draws upon a common characteristic of feature films about the

‘troubles’ in which male protagonists are typically distinguished in terms of their attitudes towards violence. As in such films, it is, of course, the case for peace, rather than continuing violence, that is shown to triumph. Thus, when faced with the escape of his rook, Jimmy flees to a mountain-side cave (the legend-steeped Gleniff cave) from where he is talked down by Pat who explains he was wrong to encourage Jimmy ‘to hate back’. Pat’s sincerity, however, is put into question by his subsequent taunt (to Danny) that he is ‘a fierce good liar’ and it is significant that Jimmy should head towards his Aunt Molly (Brenda Fricker), rather than either of the two men, at the play’s end. Despite the men’s competing beliefs, the suggestion of the play is that they share a proclivity for talk rather than action and that it is the aunt’s scepticism towards male rhetoric, combined with practical domestic support, that is of most value to Jimmy. Although this partly sets up a conventional division between the private world of domesticity and the public world of politics, the play does nonetheless seek to pursue some broader social and economic questions. Colin Welland had, of course, been responsible for one of the most radical of all Plays for Today, *Leeds United!*, about a strike of women clothing workers (Hill 2013). In the case of *Your Man from Six Counties*, a degree of concern to re-orientate the debate between violence and non-violence towards economic issues is also in evidence. So, while the scenes in the pub may serve in part to illustrate the men’s political posturing, they also provide the opportunity to stage a confrontation between traditional nationalist views and a more secular, class-based politics concerned with ending the ‘poverty, squalor and backhanders’ that are taken to characterise the contemporary southern Irish state.

Given the play is set in the South, and primarily involves a reflection on southern, rather than northern, nationalism, it is probably unsurprising that the play made relatively few ripples in the North where the play’s pacifism was generally received positively. As part of the ‘reference upwards’ process, the script had in fact been read by BBC Northern Ireland’s

Cecil Taylor when it was originally submitted under the title 'Forty Shades of Green'. Taylor wrote to the BBC in London that he could see no reason why the play 'should not be broadcast on BBC Television including Northern Ireland'. 'There are some strong references to the situation in the North, and to Protestant bigots', he continued, 'but in the context, they are entirely acceptable'.²⁷ The BBC management in London, however, were faced with a concern of a different type when it emerged that the castle shown in the film, Classiebawn Castle, was owned by Earl Mountbatten. The significance of this was that the shots of the castle occurred during a sequence in which Pat points it out to Jimmy, explaining that 'it is owned by an Englishman and all the land around' and should therefore provide fuel for his anger following the death of his father. Writing to the Managing Director, the Controller of BBC1, Bryan Cowgill, sought to play down the matter by arguing that the remarks were made by 'a hot-headed Irish idiot, whose opinion nobody else endorsed' and that 'the Englishman' was not identified with any particular individual or family. It was nonetheless felt that the inclusion of the sequence indicated a need for 'extra vigilance in this type of location drama' and may also account for the play's subsequent lack of a repeat despite the BBC's nomination of it for a British Film and Television Academy award for best single play.²⁸

Reflexive strategies: *Come the Revolution*, *Catchpenny Twist* and *The Last Window Cleaner*

Your Man from Six Counties was shot on location, entirely on film, and, despite its elements of romanticism, may be linked to a move towards increasing dramatic verisimilitude within the single play. The majority of the 1970s plays about Northern Ireland were, however, shot wholly or in part in the studio and tended to depart from realist norms. This is particularly evident in the case of the previously-discussed *Carson Country* (written by Dominic Behan

and directed by Piers Haggard). Clearly influenced by the examples of Brecht and Theatre Workshop, it consists of a loosely-structured episodic narrative, punctuated by the use of song, stills and newsreel. Its inventive visual style makes elaborate use of camera movement, changes in lighting, dissolves, superimpositions, variations of colour and slow motion not only to 'lay bare the device' but to highlight 'emblematic' moments of dramatic or political importance for Behan's dissection of the corrosive effects of sectarianism on the Belfast working class (Hill 2017). A similar emphasis upon artifice and reflexivity is also to be found in a number of other 1970s plays about Northern Ireland such as *Come the Revolution*, *Catchpenny Twist* and *The Last Window Cleaner*.

Robin Chapman's *Come the Revolution* (25 October 1977) offers a mix of the experimental – the author was associated with Theatre Workshop and possessed a reputation for plays involving musical numbers – and the oblique insofar as the play has not commonly been regarded as a play that is about Northern Ireland. Partly subverting Play for Today's reputation for political radicalism, it is a political satire about a left-wing pub theatre group, the Plumbers' Mates, with ambitions to spark the 'British revolution'. To this end, the play highlights the group's remoteness from the real concerns of the working class and takes aim at the revolutionary left, represented here by Vivian Pickles' Beth Bailey, an aristocratic actor with more than a passing resemblance to Vanessa Redgrave (then a member of the Workers' Revolutionary Party), who pressurises the group to harden its political line. The oddity of the play, however, is that the show which the Plumbers' Mates perform deals primarily with a British soldier sent to serve in Northern Ireland. In one sense, this may be taken to underline *Come the Revolution's* general point. The conflict in the North of Ireland possesses little interest for those in Britain and, as the scene involving a performance for Welsh miners at the play's end suggests, is unlikely to provoke any kind of working-class or, indeed, 'pan-Celtic' solidarity (given that the play, somewhat unexpectedly, associates the miners visually with

the Welsh nationalist party Plaid Cymru rather than Labour).²⁹ Nevertheless, given that the most substantial part of the play is devoted to the performance of the play within a play, along with a self-reflective debate about its political meanings and merits, the production is unusual in the amount of time that it devotes to Northern Ireland politics.

The Plumbers' Mates show deals with the travails of an 'Everyman', Johnny Diver (Warwick Evans), a working-class lad without a job, who enlists for the British Army. He is trained to 'put the boot in for the Government, the bosses and the T.U.C.' and ends up in Northern Ireland. Horrified by the violence, he tries to desert but is captured by the Army and is, in effect, tortured – through a procedure similar to ECT – into docility before being returned to duty and his death at the hands of the IRA. To this extent, the show, for all its agit-prop inventiveness, is fairly conventional in its emphasis upon the British soldier who is sent by the British state into a situation which he doesn't understand and for which he is inadequately prepared. The toughening-up of the play required by Beth Bailey and her political adviser, Bruce (Kenneth Colley), by contrast, involves a much clearer diagnosis of the repressive role of the British Army in Ireland, a greater emphasis upon the state's continuing use of torture and, most controversially, the recognition of the IRA's anti-imperialist struggle as 'the natural revolutionary expression of the Irish workers'. Although the majority of the group's members accept these revisions, the play itself distances itself from them, identifying it as an abandonment of the 'socialism with a human face' to which the collective originally aspired. However, although, as presented by the play, Beth and Bruce's views are clearly problematic (and politically deluded), their critique of the group's show is not entirely misplaced. They rightly object to the song about 'Irish rabbits fighting in their hutch' and challenge the group's assumption that the conflict is simply an internal matter in which the role of the British army is simply there 'to keep the peace'. Thus, despite its politically circumspect outlook, *Come the Revolution's* mixture of comedy and self-

referentiality does at least allow it to address a broader range of issues – such as the role of the army and the use of torture, CS gas and plastic bullets - that a mainstream play about Northern Ireland would otherwise have found it difficult to address.

A similar mix of dramatic elements may also be found in Belfast writer Stewart Parker's *Catchpenny Twist* (5 December 1977) about two former teachers, Roy (Gerard Murphy) and Martin (Sam Dale), struggling to make a career as songwriters in Belfast. In order to make ends meet, they are prepared to write maudlin Republican ballads for a former friend, Marie (Maggie Shevlin), but subsequently leave Belfast in a hurry when two bullets arrive in the mail. In Dublin they team up with an old flame of Roy's, Monagh (Frances Tomelty), with whom they begin to achieve some success (in spite of Monagh's limitations as a singer). She succeeds in obtaining a spot on television and one of their songs, 'Cry Baby', is selected for a Eurovision-style competition in Luxemburg. Martin, however, learns from Marie that a loyalist paper has accused the two men of spying for British intelligence (on the grounds that they have written 'novelty numbers' for loyalists in addition to Republican ballads) and the men now flee to London where they secure a deal with a leading record company (provided they split with Monagh). However, on their return from the international song contest, the two men, and it would seem Monagh, are all – without any warning – blown up at the airport by a parcel bomb.

Rather oddly billed as a 'a comedy with music' in the *Radio Times*, this was a bold and unexpected ending that attracted some viewer complaints and led BBC management to agree that it might have been better referred to as a 'tragi-comedy'.³⁰ Parker (2008) himself was a highly self-reflective writer who emphasised the 'playfulness' of his play-writing and its capacity to move between polarities. So while he acknowledged a debt to both Brecht and Beckett, he was also drawn to popular culture and, for some critics, the play's most obvious parallels were with Bing Crosby and Bob Hope's *Road* movies and Howard Schuman's

ITV's 1976 series *Rock Follies* (in which the actor Sam Dale, who plays Martyn in *Catchpenny Twist*, had previously appeared). The play, in this regard, builds reflexivity into the very structure of the play by making the competing demands imposed on creative production its subject-matter and employing a sub-Brechtian plot in which musical interludes, emotional drama and bursts of political argument compete for attention and the tone oscillates between the satirical and the serious.

As such, the play maintains a difficult balancing act and Parker himself was concerned that 'the stage version's peculiar mix of realism and surrealism' would prove 'awkward' on television (Richtarik 2012: 183). On stage, the play was heavily stylised, employing a choric Vocal Trio whose members doubled as secondary characters. The television production, however, grounds the action in a more concrete physical reality – as in the opening sequence in which the television producer Ian Playfair (Derek Lord) is shown filming a documentary in Belfast – that partly stands at odds with the more overtly symbolic aspects of the original. The use of such material, in part, signals the play's departure from the imagery of the 'troubles' conventionally associated with factual programming but also serves as a reminder, for both characters and viewers, of the continuing background presence of the conflict. Thus, when the main characters are in Dublin, there is a momentarily disorienting cut to footage of the 'troubles' that turns out to be from Playfair's film. Watching it on television, Monagh tells Roy that 'it'll not go away just because you switch it off' and it this underlying sense of the obstacles blocking the characters' attempts to escape that runs throughout the play.

In her biographical study of the play's author, Marilyn Richtarik reveals the influence of the deaths of members of the Miami Showband (composed of both Catholics and Protestants) at the hands of loyalist killers in 1975. For Parker, they died 'because of where they lived, not because of what they did for a living' and their murders may be seen to

involve a confrontation between the ‘ancient’ and ‘modern’ in which the former wreaks ‘a blind atavistic revenge’ on the latter (2012: 164). It is easy to see how this also applies to *Catchpenny Twist* in which the hapless music writers Roy (a Protestant) and Martyn (a Catholic) seek to position themselves within the ‘modern’ world of commerce, the Common Market, ‘aeroplanes, spin dryers’ and ‘pinball machines’ but still find themselves enmeshed in ‘eight hundred years of history’. However, while the play maintains a distance from Marie’s narrow fixation on the injustices of the past, it is also critical of Martyn and Roy’s attempt simply to ignore the past and embrace the modern (particularly in the ‘inauthentic’ form of commercialised - ‘catchpenny’ - music). To this extent, the play partly unsettles the conventional opposition between tradition (understood as backward) and modernity (associated with progress) upon which representations of the ‘troubles’ have commonly relied. However, in doing so, the play is also deprived of a more positive perspective on the ‘modern’ and the resources that it might offer in overcoming the destructive effects of the past. Thus, while Andrews (1989: 251) argues that the stylised ending of the original play encourages ‘a detached and critical awareness’ that ‘works against fatalistic hopelessness’ through the cultivation of an awareness of historical ‘process’, the more realistic and emotionally-charged ending of the television version might be said to risk the reverse effect and partly reinforces the very sense of fatalism that Parker’s ludic strategies have otherwise attempted to avoid.³¹

Parker’s playful mix of influences from both high and low culture also possesses some parallels with the later Play for Today, *The Last Window Cleaner* (13 February 1979). Ron Hutchinson’s previous Play for Today, *The Out of Town Boys* (2 January 1979), about feuds within the Irish-dominated building industry in the English Midlands, had been praised by viewers for its ‘believable plot’ and the ‘realism’ of its ‘dialogue, and characterisation’.³² *The Last Window Cleaner*, however, takes a very different aesthetic route. Described by

Hutchinson as ‘a joke’, the play abandons dramatic probability and psychological plausibility in favour of an absurdist take on the ‘troubles’ in which, as the programme publicity explained, ‘nothing is what it seems because everyone has been living with the troubles far too long’.³³ In doing so the play combines the iconoclasm and comic intent of a play such as Brendan Behan’s *The Hostage* with the loose dramatic structure and caricature characteristic of the television sketch show in order to highlight, and throw into question, the prevailing perceptions of the Northern Irish conflict

A dim-witted English policeman from Solihull, DC Deacey (Ken Campbell), is sent to Belfast in order to gather intelligence on Sammy MacMurtrey (Joe McPartland) whom a British Army computer has identified as the ‘terrorist of the month’. MacMurtrey is the ‘last window cleaner’ of the play’s title whose services are rarely needed in a city of devastated buildings and boarded-up windows. However, MacMurtrey and his family also run a Belfast boarding house, the ‘Crumlin View’, where Deacey arrives in the guise of a sports equipment salesman. Once there he finds little evidence of MacMurtrey’s terrorist activities (coming to the conclusion that he’d struggle to make it as a ‘hitman for Mothercare’) but also comes into contact with the building’s highly unusual set of lodgers (who form a sort of demented microcosm of Northern Irish society). They include a prostitute with a specialty in role play and flagellation, two male ‘bondage freaks’ (‘Your Man’ and ‘Himself’) who exchange sado-masochistic roles during acts of mutual interrogation (before confessing to virtually every act of violence during the ‘troubles’ when Deacey confronts them) and an older middle-class man, Muldooney (Patrick Magee), who talks like an out-of-date Ulster tourist guide and remains largely oblivious to the changes around him. Deacey is also assisted by the only black officer in the Royal Ulster Constabulary, Leroy (Norman Beaton), who explains the ‘pre-post-colonial’ situation in Northern Ireland in terms of the discrimination against both Catholics and ‘homosexuals’. This also leads him to ascribe responsibility for the continuing

‘bombing and shooting’ to ‘the homosexuals’ who are ‘just about to be legalised’. It is also Leroy who inadvertently ‘solves’ the mystery of the boarding house which turns out not to be a cover for paramilitarism but for a compensation scam involving members of the MacMurtrey family cutting off the limbs of their older guests - with their apparent consent - in order to make fraudulent claims for criminal injuries.

Through these strategies of exaggeration and excess, the play hits out in various directions. It pokes fun at middle-class aloofness from the conflicts as well as the nostalgia for a simpler Northern Ireland when the Belfast singer Ruby Murray enjoyed a string of UK Top Ten hits; in this play, the Ruby Murray look-alike Munty (Kate Thompson) engages in amorous play with her father (‘Dear Daddy’) and prepares ‘the Granda’ for mutilation (and ultimately death). It also exposes the hypocrisies of a society where, ten years after the decriminalisation of homosexuality in England, homosexuality is still illegal (and the Democratic Unionist Party leader Ian Paisley is – in reality not in fiction – leading a campaign to ‘Save Ulster from Sodomy’). The play also projects the ways in which the violence has become normalised and even taken for granted. British soldiers run out of the toilet, SAS men ‘on exercise’ appear from under the bath and paramilitaries host press conferences at which journalists may have their photograph taken with hooded men and purchase a car sticker proclaiming ‘I’ve spoken to the men of violence’. However, perhaps, the most potent imagery is that associated with the male couple (Pat Abernethy and a very young Liam Neeson) who spend their days locked in a room engaged in acts of mutual interrogation and torture in which the roles of policeman and paramilitary become reversible. In a vivid illustration of how the characters have been living with the ‘troubles’ for ‘far too long’, their repetitive scenarios suggest how such roles have become not only addictive but also mutually reinforcing.³⁴ During one of his briefings, the army officer Captain Wigmore (John Bird) tells Deacey that, as part of the army’s deployment of ‘technology versus

terrorism’, their computer has provided a print-out indicating that the ‘troubles’ had ended in May 1973; while evidently a joke at the expense of military intelligence the play also raises the possibility that this might actually be so with the main protagonists, incapable of abandoning their old roles, simply carrying on with their historically-embedded patterns of behaviour.

It is, however, a play that makes relatively high demands on the viewer in terms of both its unfamiliar dramatic form and dependence upon prior knowledge of the specificities of the Northern Irish situation (in relation to race, sexuality and, even, local pride in Ruby Murray). It is not entirely surprising therefore that the majority of viewers found the play ‘difficult to understand’ and sometimes ‘incomprehensible’.³⁵ As with *Catchpenny Twist*, the play’s adoption of an unorthodox aesthetic ran the risk of subverting its own ostensive purposes. Thus, even when critics were sympathetic to the work, they struggled to decipher its meanings. The critic Richard Last (1979), for example, responded positively to the play’s methodology, comparing its ‘brand of dislocated surrealism’ to the work of N.F. Simpson, *Monty Python*, *Cold Comfort Farm*, *Soap* and, even, *Pennies from Heaven*. However, despite this wide-ranging, intertextual frame of reference, he still takes the play’s ‘Irishry’ to be its ‘paramount’ feature and interprets its surrealism as the means whereby the ‘impossibility’ of the situation in the North may be shown. In this respect, for all its energy, irreverence and moments of insight, the play ends up treading a fine line between subverting dominant perceptions of the conflict and reproducing them (in an exaggerated, if startling, form).

Conclusion

Given that the series carried on until 1984, the Plays for Today of the 1970s constitute only some of those made about Northern Ireland. The justification for focusing upon them is that

they are generally the least known and consist of an often surprising mix of plays that tested out different, and often formally innovative, ways of addressing the ‘troubles’ before the television ‘troubles drama’ solidified into more conventional forms. For a range of reasons, the numbers of plays dealing with Northern Ireland began to increase substantially during the 1980s. In the case of *Play for Today*, this partly resulted from the increasing activity of BBC Northern Ireland which established its own drama department under Chris Parr and became involved in commissioning full-length drama productions. This led to an early success with Graham Reid’s *Too Late to Talk to Billy* (16 February 1982) about the predicaments of a Protestant working-class family in Belfast, and was followed by two further plays dealing with the changing dynamics within the same family: *A Matter of Choice for Billy* (10 May 1983) and *A Coming to Terms for Billy* (21 February 1984). These were both popular and significant works but, as Martin McLoone indicates, operated within a relatively apolitical ‘humanist framework’ that was destined to become the prevailing mode of ‘troubles’ drama in the period that followed (2008: 15). Although more experimental ‘troubles’ dramas did continue to be made – particularly through the work of director Alan Clarke - these also became increasingly rare. So, while the Northern Ireland *Plays for Today* of the 1970s comprise an eclectic mix of dramas, of varying qualities and outlooks, they do nevertheless represent an interesting and significant moment in the history of ‘troubles’ television drama which is now largely ‘forgotten’ and justifies more attention and analysis than it has so far received.

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¹ Bardon is relying upon the contemporary judgement of Cecil Taylor, BBC Northern Ireland's Assistant Head of Programmes, who complained of the play's reliance upon 'clichés' and 'caricatures' (Bardon: 101).

² Commissioning Brief, 14 November 1973, BBCWAC RCont20, 'Wilson John Haire'.

³ *Belfast Telegraph*, 7 February 1974, p.3.

⁴ 'Play for Today in Northern Ireland', Memo from Christopher Morahan, Head of Plays, Drama, Television to C.P.S., 12 March 1974, BBCWAC T62/289/1.

⁵ 'The Dandelion Clock', Memo from Head of Plays, Drama, Television, to D.P.Tel., 11 June 1974, BBCWAC T62/289/1.

⁶ *The Dandelion Clock* was not repeated and was the only one of the twenty-one plays making up the 1974-5 season of Play for Today to be wiped. Focusing on a young girl's search for her father (who, it subsequently turns out, is simply at work), the play possessed a semi-hallucinatory quality which, as one reviewer put it, aspired to 'a sort of poetry of realism' (Rothwell 1975: 16).

⁷ Commissioning Brief, 3 May 1971, BBCWAC T48/75/1.

⁸ Minutes of the Board of Governors, 27 January 1972, BBCWAC R1/40/1.

⁹ Memo from Director of Programmes, Television, to Director General, 4 October 1972, BBCWAC R78/2647/1.

¹⁰ Memo from Director of Programmes, Television, to Director General, 4 October 1972, BBCWAC R78/2647/1. The BBC's sensitivity concerning the play's portrait of the Orange Order possess some parallels

with Peter McDougall's *Just Another Saturday* (13 March 1975), another Play for Today which deals with an Orange march in Glasgow and probes the same sectarian tensions as those to be found in *Carson Country*. Although the screenplay was commissioned and delivered in 1971, it did not begin filming until 1974 and was not broadcast until 1975 as a result of ongoing concerns about its content and possible reception.

¹¹ Memo from Director of Programmes, Television, to Director General, 4 October 1972, BBCWAC R78/2647/1.

¹² Letter to the Rt.Hon. William Whitelaw, Northern Ireland Office, from Charles Curran, Director-General, 11 October 1972, BBCWAC R78/2647/1.

¹³ Memo from Director General to M.D.Tel. and D.N.C.A, 9 February 1978, BBCWAC T62/289/1.

¹⁴ Memo from Head of Programmes, N. Ireland to D.N.C.A., 20 February 1978; Memo from Controller, BBC Northern Ireland to D.N.C.A., 22 February 1978, BBCWAC T62/289/1. Hawthorne was concerned that previously agreed 'safeguards' had not been implemented and indicated his wish to suspend his earlier 'endorsement' of the production proceeding.

¹⁵ Minutes of a meeting of News and Current Affairs, 14 March 1978, BBCWAC T62/289/1.

¹⁶ 'The Legion Hall Bombing', transcript sent from H.P.D.Tel. to C.BBC1 (undated), BBCWAC T62/289/1.

¹⁷ Letter from Simons, Muirhead and Allan (Solicitors) (on behalf of Caryl Churchill) to Director General, 14 August 1978, BBCWAC RCont 21 'Caryl Churchill'.

¹⁸ *Radio Times*, 15-21 October 1977, p. 45.

¹⁹ Letter from Michael Swann, Chair, BBC Board of Governors, to Mr. R. Fowler, 2 March 1978, BBCWAC R78/2647/1. This provides an explanation of the decision of the Managing Director, Television, Alasdair Milne, to refuse to show the play. See Rolinson (2005) for a discussion of the case.

²⁰ Telegram from Information Officer, Northern Ireland to Head of Publicity, London, BBCWAC R78/2647/1.

²¹ 'BBC reports little reaction to play about bombing', *Times*, 23 August 1978, p.2.

²² Directive from Director-General, 'Northern Ireland and Eire', 20 October 1959, BBCWAC R34/1627/1. This was a revised and updated version originally circulated in 1949.

²³ Memo from Robert McCall, Controller, Northern Ireland to H.P.D.Tel., 21 November 1964 and Minutes of a meeting of Television Controllers, 24 November 1964, BBCWAC T5/968/1. The play was eventually transmitted on 5 May 1965, nearly a year-and-a-half after its initial transmission date.

²⁴ In 1977 the Controller of BBC Northern Ireland, Richard Francis, acknowledged the historic problems of the BBC's association with 'Britishness' and the Unionist status quo and addressed the problems of broadcasting to a 'community in conflict' (Francis 1977: 7-8). The extent of internal reforms, however, remained the subject of scrutiny and, in 1983, Peter Lennon was still questioning the dominance of Ulster Protestants within senior levels of television management and the consequences of this for news reporting and drama production (Lennon 1983).

²⁵ 'Drama Early Warning Synopsis', 8 February 1974; 'The Committed Drama' (undated), BBCWAC T62/223/1.

²⁶ The play is notable for its use of natural imagery such as the flat-topped rock formation Ben Bulbin and the churchyard below where the poet W.B. Yeats is buried. Yeats was drawn to both the supernatural and mythological associations of Ben Bulbin (referred to as 'a magic mountain' when first seen in the play) and the concerns of his poetry infuse the drama more generally.

²⁷ Quoted in memo from the Head of Plays (Drama, Television), Christopher Morahan to the Controller of BBC1, Bryan Cowgill, 17 December 1975, BBCWAC T48/585/1.

²⁸ Memo from Bryan Cowgill, Controller, BBC1, to Managing Director, Television, 11 February 1977, BBC WAC T62/289/1.

²⁹ In this regard, the play might also be said to reflect upon the difficulty Northern Ireland Plays for Today themselves faced in engaging an audience's attention. In the Audience Research Report for *Your Man from Six Counties*, for example, a number of viewers complained that they were 'sick of hearing about Northern Ireland' and thought the amount of news coverage was 'more than enough' without plays being written on the subject (particularly as they were rarely regarded as 'entertainment') (BBC Audience Research Report, 'Your Man from Six Counties', BBCWAC VR/76/622).

³⁰ *Radio Times*, 3-9 December 1977, p. 43; Television Weekly Programme Review, 7 December 1977, BBCWAC.

³¹ Stewart Parker's later Play for Today, *Iris in the Traffic, Ruby in the Rain* (24 November 1981), focused on a day in the life of two young women in Belfast, might, however, be said to provide something of a riposte to the earlier play by virtue of its more affirmative vision of female community and solidarity.

³² BBC Audience Research Report, 'The Out of Town Boys', 23 January 1979, BBCWAC VR/79/6.

³³ *Radio Times*, 10-16 February 1979, p. 38.

³⁴ A 'cell block interrogation' is also central to Hutchinson's later, more famous work, *Rat in the Skull* in which a Protestant RUC inspector interviews a Catholic suspect, detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, during which they discover a hidden bond. The original play was also made into a television version (ITV, 4 January 1987).

³⁵ BBC Audience Research Report, 'The Last Window Cleaner', 6 March 1979, BBCWAC VR/79/81.