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UNITED KINGDOM! (PART TWO) Radical Television Drama Thatcher and Beyond

Without doubt the finest British television drama has usually emerged from those writers seeking to challenge the prevailing establishment view, explore the inequalities within society or push at the boundaries of morality and taste – the so called ‘radical’ dramatists. This two-part season examines the changes in ‘radical’ drama, as renowned writers and producers explored the divisions underpinning British society in the 1960s and their reactions to Margaret Thatcher coming to power in 1979.

Last month, part one of this season examined the origins of the radical drama movement and its reaction to the emerging right-wing politics of the Thatcher government.

This month we explore the changes that have taken place in radical drama as a new generation of writers has emerged, with a more tenuous connection to the left-wing ideology of the 60s and 70s, whose craft was more likely to have been honed on genre-led series than overtly political dramas. From powerful responses to Britain at war (*The Falklands Play*) to examinations of the mistrust and cynicism engendered by the reaction to New Labour (*The Deal; The Government Inspector*), the season considers the changing definition of what it means to be a ‘radical’ dramatist now. Having already focused on how Thatcher changed the television industry, we ask how the genre has had to adapt to survive in the post-Thatcher television marketplace and what form it should take in the multi-channel age. To help us examine such issues we will be joined in a special discussion by the writer and producer **Paul Abbott**, Head of Drama Channel 4 **Liza Marshall**, director **Penny Woolcott**, producer **Kenith Trodd**, and the writer/creator of **Skins**, **Bryan Elsley**. The debate will follow a preview screening of an episode from the new series of Abbott’s *Shameless*, a fine example of an almost ‘post’-radical drama.

Other screenings will include talks by writers, producers and directors such as **Peter Flannery**, **Ian Curteis**, **Jeremy Howe**, **Stephen Frears** and, schedules permitting, **Peter Morgan**. There will also be a lecture examining *The Government Inspector* in greater detail prior to the screening.

In collaboration with the Department of Media Arts, Royal Holloway, University of London and with support from LCACE



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PROGRAMME

Events

TV Preview: Shameless Series 7 (Episode TBC) Channel 4/Company Pictures.

Dir Lawrence Till. With David Threlfall, Tina Malone, Gerard Kearns, Rebecca Atkinson. 48min

As part of our Radical TV Drama season, we are pleased to present an exclusive preview screening of an episode of the new series. The award-winning drama continues on its roller-coaster way. Eight months on, and Frank Gallagher hits 50, which only serves to depress him – until he finds love with librarian Libby. Christenings, riots, salsa, school reunions, sibling rivalry, gigolos and messages from beyond the grave... welcome back to the world of *Shameless*.

+ Panel Discussion: After Thatcher: The New Radical Drama

Our eminent panel – **Liza Marshall**, Head of Drama at Channel 4; **Paul Abbott**, writer and producer of *Shameless*; producer **Kenith Trodd**; director **Penny Woolcott**; **Bryan Elsley**, creator of *Skins*; and chairperson **Jonathan Powell**, former Controller BBC1 – discusses the changes in radical drama since Thatcher, its response to

New Labour and where it is headed in the multi-channel landscape.

Tue 8 Dec 18:20 NFT1

Screenings

Docudrama Making Mischief

Lecture by Derek Paget

Illustrating his talk with clips from *The Government Inspector* and *The Deal*, Derek Paget (University of Reading) will consider docudrama's potential both to examine – and to cause – controversy. By 'making mischief' in the way they offer alternatives to official accounts, dramas like these shed new and critical light on contemporary public events.

Wed 9 Dec 18:10 NFT3

The Government Inspector

Ch4/Mentorn/Arte France/Stonehenge Films 2005. Dir Peter Kosminsky. With Mark Rylance, Jonathan Cake, Emma Fielding, Daniel Ryan. 106min

Outed as the source for the infamous BBC report that claimed the government had 'sexed up' the dossier over weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, Dr David Kelly was placed under such pressure that he took his own life. Peter Kosminsky's powerful account of the events leading to this tragedy asks troubling questions about the basis on which we went to war and the extent to which one individual was sacrificed in the name of national security.

Sun 6 Dec 18:10 NFT3

Wed 9 Dec 20:30 NFT3

King of the Ghetto

BBC 1986. Dir Roy Battersby. With Tim Roth, Zia Mohyeddin, Gwyneth Strong, Ian Dury

In this challenging drama about race relations Tim Roth gives an intense performance as an idealistic squatter trying to create homes for poor Bengali families in the slums of East London. Writer Farrukh Dhondy pulls no punches in depicting a community troubled from within by racketeering, political corruption and white middle class liberalism, and threatened from without by right-wing extremism.

Tue 1 Dec 18:20 NFT2

Ep1 & 2 106 min (Interval)

Ep3 & 4 112 min

The Falklands Play + Discussion with writer Ian Curteis, producer Jeremy Howe and director Michael Samuels

BBC 2002. Commissioned 1986. Dir Michael Samuels. With Patricia Hodge. 95min

Deemed too celebratory of Thatcher in the run-up to the 1987 election, this drama about the lead-up to the Falklands War was shelved by the BBC, leading to accusations of left-wing bias in the corporation. With the arrival of BBC4 the project was revived to allow us to make up our own minds about the difficult decision to go to war – reminding us that the left does not have the monopoly on ‘radical’ drama.

Thu 3 Dec 18:10 NFT2

The Deal + Discussion

Channel 4/Granada TV 2003. Dir Stephen Frears. With Michael Sheen, David Morrissey, Paul Rhys, Frank Kelly. 76min

Peter Morgan cleverly dissects the relationship that has defined the political scene over the last decade – that between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. In presenting the interface between personal ambition and political principles Morgan gives us much to think about. Featuring stunning performances from Sheen and Morrissey and impeccable direction by Frears.

Fri 4 Dec 18:10 NFT3

+

Discussion with writer director **Stephen Frears** and (work commitments permitting) **Peter Morgan**

Road

BBC 1987 Dir Alan Clarke. With Jane Horrocks, William Armstrong, Susan Brown, Willy Ross. 63min

Winner of the Monte Carlo International TV Festival and adapted from Jim Cartwright’s play for the Royal Court, this is one of Alan Clarke’s finest achievements. Using long, flowing Steadicam shots, characters voicing their innermost thoughts and fears direct to camera, and a fragmented narrative structure, the drama builds in expressionistic intensity. A poetic account of the loss and despair that extreme poverty brings in its wake.

+ Tina Goes Shopping

Channel 4 1999 Dir Penny Woolcock. 64min

Using the residents of Leeds council estates and their own true stories and improvisations, Penny Woolcock shaped a drama focusing on the story of Tina, who scrapes together a living by shoplifting. Tina inhabits an underclass with its own culture and rules that sits outside of the accepted norms of the rest of society. In standing back from her subject matter, Woolcock increases both our discomfort and our sense of collective responsibility.

Thu 10 Dec 20:30 NFT3

Our Friends in the North + Panel discussion with Peter Flannery, Christopher Eccleston and producers Michael Wearing and Charles Pattinson

BBC 1996 (Episode 7: 1984) Dir Simon Cellan Jones. With Christopher Eccleston, Mark Strong, Gina McKee. 65min

Loyalties to family, community and political principles are tested to breaking point in this episode of Peter Flannery’s seminal series. As the miners’ strike takes hold, police brutality is used to hold the line and contain ‘the enemy within’. Combining the personal with the political, this caught the mood for a whole generation.

Fri 11 Dec 18:20 NFT2

NOTES TO EDITORS

Booking information

The BFI Southbank is open to all. BFI members are entitled to a discount on all tickets. BFI Southbank Box Office tel: 020 7928 3232. Unless otherwise stated, tickets are £9.00, concs £7.60. Website

www.bfi.org.uk/southbank

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***** PICTURE DESK *****

A selection of images for journalistic use in promoting these BFI Southbank screenings can be found at www.image.net under BFI / BFI Southbank / December 2009