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The cultural superpower British cultural projection abroad

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Manuscripts

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Editorial

A taste of cultural Britain

What is "British culture"? Depending on whom we ask, this question has multiple possible answers. Many of us will immediately think of the great heroes of British literature, ranging from the timeless and celebrated works of authors, playwrights and poets like Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare and John Milton to Charles Dickens, William Wordsworth, Jane Austen, Agatha Christie and George Orwell. Moreover, the countless great children and fantasy tales fostered in Britain should not be forgotten. Characters like Winnie the Pooh (A.A. Milne), Alice in Wonderland (Lewis Carroll) and Harry Potter (J.K. Rowling) all have their home in Britain. The magical sceneries of Narnia (CS Lewis), the Middle-Earth (Tolkien) and the wicked tales of Roald Dahl also belong in Britain's cultural heritage.

To others, the phrase British culture will immediately bring to mind some of the most popular musicians of all times, among them The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and David Bowie. In the modern story of "Britpop", bands and individual artists like Oasis, Blur, Spice Girls and Robbie Williams have left footprints on both the national and international musical scene.

To others again, British culture equals the successes of British art, architecture, theatre, musicals, cinema, humour, sports or broadcasting. From Harold Pinter to Andrew Lloyd Webber, from *Monty Python* and *Yes, Minister* to *Little Britain* and *The Office*, and from English football and pub culture to impeccable BBC productions and London's rock solid position as a world capital for art and fashion.

No single study could cover the breadth of British cultural projection abroad. This year's first issue of *British Politics Review* offers instead an eclectic collection of articles concerning Britain's role as a "cultural superpower". As always, we are proud to offer high quality articles from a first-rate team of contributors in both Britain and Norway. On the British side, they include Dan Rebellato, John Williams, Sarah Barrow, Alwyn Turner, Nicholas Clifton and Clive Gray. On the Norwegian side, Lars Mjøen, Ellen Horn and Einar Bjorvand contribute to a taste of cultural Britain.

With best wishes for 2011,

Øivind Bratberg and Kristin M. Haugevik, Editors

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The British theatre and its impact: a personal reflection

By Ellen Horn

Ellen Horn was educated at the Norwegian National Academy of Theatre and made her acting debut in 1975. Since then, she has participated in a wide range of stage drama and film. From 1992 to 2000, Horn was director of the National Theatre of Norway. In 2000-01 she was Secretary of State for Culture. Currently the director of Riksteatret, she has also maintained a successful acting career.



strong new British playwrights at the Royal Court theatre in London. There, the young and wild ones would show up, with the provocative Sarah Kaine and Mark Ravenhill at the forefront, and they revolutionised the theatre both in Britain and in Norway.

At the National Theatre of Norway, Nationaltheatret, where I have worked as an actor in the company and was artistic director for many years, we invited the great Shakespeare directors John Barton and Terry Hands to come and work with us. They directed several performances of both Shakespeare, Ibsen and Checkhov, and inspired the company at Nationaltheatret to work hard with the language. At the same time they gave the Norwegian audience a sense of the high quality of British theatre.

Today, I would argue, Norwegian theatre is more influenced by the expressive intellectual theatre from Berlin, and directors are less conscious than before of the language, the words and the precise delivering of a line which are so typical for the British. But those of us who have had the privilege of experiencing such high-class actors as Judy Dench, Maggie Smith, Glenda Jackson or Helen Mirren, Sir Laurence Olivier, Ian McKellan, Michael Gambon or Alan Bates live on the main stages of London's West End will never forget it. These impressions from British actors are still alive in many of us. We will continue to study their work, and use what we learned by watching these great artists on the stage as long as we are active in the Norwegian theatre, and we will keep on dreaming about reaching their level.

I also must use this opportunity to mention my favourite theatre company, the Theatre Complicité, with their artistic leader Simon McBurney. Their offices and rehearsal studios are situated in Camden Town in London, but they work internationally most of the year. I have seen many of their performances, but the first one was *Street of Crocodiles* which really knocked me out. I first and foremost remember the beauty of the choreography and the tenderness of the acting in this very intense story from the Second World War. It was so humane, so intelligent, so simple - and visually poetic and tragic. Brilliant. As all the best theatre experiences of my life (most of them happened to take place in Britain) it made me cry and laugh at the same time. I also remember very well meeting coincidentally with the writer Salman Rushdie during the break, and we were both extremely touched by the play. I suddenly felt I was part of the world.

The two last performances I saw with

Simon McBurney and Theatre Complicité, *A minute too late* and Beckett's *End Game*, were performed at the British National Theatre. This theatre is exceptional, and has to be mentioned as one of the most inspiring arenas that I know. I always make a visit to the massive building at the South Bank of London whenever I have the opportunity. When you enter the front door of house, you discover the best theatre foyer of the world, with so many activities - concerts and readings - and the most attractive theatre bookshop you could possibly find - and finally its two wonderful stages, Lyttleton and Olivier. I wish from the bottom of my heart that we could offer Norwegian audiences a theatre institution like this one day! Moreover, the National Theatre has the most superb, vivid and easy to-go-to homepages on the internet, where you can really spend a day or two finding interesting information.

In my capacity as Norwegian Secretary of State for Culture (2000-01), I made an official visit to London and I was very happy to meet with my British colleague, the Secretary of State for Media, Sports and Culture, Chris Smith. We had a lot to talk about, and I found it extremely interesting to learn how British politicians were deeply involved in promoting the arts and culture, as well as what they call the cultural industries - seeing culture as the most rapidly growing business in Britain.

When I read in the papers that the wonderful actress Susanna York died a few weeks ago - the memory of a most brilliant performance of *Ghosts* by Henrik Ibsen passed through my head, were she played the most intelligent and sensitive Mrs. Alving I have ever seen. They visited Nationaltheatret in 1989, and we were all thrilled.

In way of conclusion, I would like to tell a true story from recent British theatre history: When the late Sir Laurence Olivier passed away, the head of the Royal Shakespeare Company, Terry Hands, went on stage before the evening's performance at the theatre in Stratford, to share the sad news with the audience. But he ended his speech in a very special way: "I could think of nothing worse for an actor than one minute's silence," he said, "So I suggest one minute of standing applause!"

And so they did - they stood up with tears in their eyes and clapped their hands for one of the greatest actors in modern history. This story is also one of the reasons why I love and admire the British theatre.

To be or not to be!

To be or not to be are Hamlet's immortal words from the famous play by William Shakespeare. And without the heritage from William Shakespeare, the European theatre would definitely not have been what it is today. The influence of British theatre on my generation of theatre people, writers, artistic directors, actors and directors cannot be overestimated.

I was lucky when I came to London for the first time around 1970, at the age of 19 and - after having slept on the street a whole night - managed to buy a ticket for Peter Brook's legendary production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It was an unforgettable experience: poetic, magic and physically breath-taking. Brook has almost become a legend, working all over the world, and is famous for making a theatre simple in form and rich in meaning. I was proud and found it extremely touching when he was the first artist in the world to receive the International Ibsen Award in 2008.

The classical British text-based tradition of playing Shakespeare is the fundamental schooling of my generation. When the Royal Shakespeare Company was established, we all travelled to Stratford-upon-Avon to admire their brave renewal of tradition, building a modern theatre based on Shakespeare's work. I dare say that this brave effort of the Royal Shakespeare Company has inspired us in Norway to work more unconventionally with our own Ibsen plays.

But the Norwegian interest in British theatre is not only based on Shakespeare and the classics, we have through the years played a lot of modern British drama in Norway. Especially the works by Nobel Prize laureates Harold Pinter and Arnold Wesker are highly appreciated, and in the 1990s we discovered many

British theatre in a post-national era

By Dan Rebellato

Overseas projection.

Despite the health of its national theatre, Britain was late in getting a National Theatre. Most European countries established their national theatres in the nineteenth century, as part of the wave of nationalist movements that swept through Europe.

Czechoslovakia got theirs in 1862; Greece in 1880; Norway opened the Nationaltheatret in 1899; early assertions of German nationalism came in the eighteenth century with Lessing's attempts to found a national theatre in Munich and in Goethe and Schiller's Weimar Theatre, both cities now boasting a national theatre, with a third in Mannheim.

In Britain, by contrast, calls for a national theatre in the nineteenth century came to nothing and it was at late as 1963 that the National Theatre began operation and only 1976 before it opened its own building. The United Kingdom did not partake in quite the same struggle for nationalist self-assertion that shaped the nineteenth-century history of countries like Norway, Italy and Germany. But perhaps related to that is a sense that Britain, easing into its imperialist role, felt no need to identify itself with as parochial a geopolitical identity as a nation. It had its eyes on global leadership, educating the world in laissez-faire economics and parliamentary democracy. Why be a nation when you can embody the destiny of the world? Well, that's the theory why no national theatre emerged in Britain.

Following the victory of Italian unification in the mid-nineteenth-century, nationalist statesman, Massimo D'Azeglio is held to have remarked "We have made Italy; now we must make the Italians". By that he meant that the political process needed to be matched with a cultural transformation; turning people into a People. In Italy and elsewhere, the theatre played a role, with competition



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for dialect dramas, authentic expressions of national culture that would allow audiences collectively to understand the distinctiveness of their new identities.

Britain, with its eye on a wider role, was perhaps reluctant to admit that its cultural identity was limited to its island shores and correspondingly felt no need for a national theatre. The situation now is quite different. Britain passed its National Theatre Act in 1949, after a bruising war that demonstrated some degree of moral authority but also its inability to play world leader any longer without considerable help. For the architects of post-war Britain, culture seemed a way for Britain to continue "punching above its weight"; its culture would wax as its Empire waned. Of course, it has continued to be an abiding belief of the Foreign Office that Britain's world role lies not so much in its sheer power but in its canny position at the intersection of three great power blocks: North America, Europe and the Commonwealth. By trying to keep them all sweet it Britain is supposed to maintain a balancing role in major world conflicts. Some version of this doctrine can be seen from Churchill to Blair. National self-perception thus continues to be built upon an understanding of Britain as global, or at least internationalist.

There is an obvious conflict between the nation-oriented geopolitical model that so occupied the thoughts of the nineteenth-century nationalist dreamers and the borderless world of today. The latter is traversed by flows of goods, services and labour, encircled by weightless information and characterised by digital, diffuse transactions across the world. Are the borders of a nation meaningful any more?

As international corporations and free-market apologists work to tear down border controls, as we become increasingly international in our populations, our social connections, our dietary cultures, our cultural diets, what is an Italian? What is authentically Norwegian? How do you know you are really British?

There are, of course, morbid symptoms of this change – violence against immigrants, the rise of far-right groups from the Lega Nord to the English Defence League – and yet our cultures are changing. It is a token of how far they have changed that the far-right's iconography has to be pushed ever further back into the past, even further into the imaginary twilight of mist and myth, to find an authentic national identity.

How has British theatre responded to these changes? Our theatre is, regrettably, somewhat insular. Partly this is because of its success.

Theatre continues to be at the heart of our culture; widely reviewed, cheaply available, popularly attended. We have, of course, a long tradition of theatremaking (though, it is less often noted, a tradition sustained throughout its history by international imports, from the Italian Comedy to Scandinavian Naturalism) and Shakespeare continues to be our pride and our burden.

But there are several ways in which British theatre has responded to the opening up of national borders, the emergence of a globalised world. First, Britain created the first genuinely globalised theatre. In 1981, Andrew Lloyd-Webber opened his hugely successful musical show *Cats*. This was the first of a series of megamusicals that includes *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Les Miserables*, *Miss Saigon*, *The Lion King* and *Mamma Mia*. All but *The Lion King* first opened in London. The key innovation of these shows is that subsequent productions are required to follow the original production to the last note, costume, lighting change, souvenir programme and commemorative key-ring. If you put on *The Phantom of the Opera*, you are not so much opening a new production as opening a new franchise of a successful global chain.

"For the architects of post-war Britain, culture seemed a way for Britain to continue punching above its weight."



The National. The Royal National Theatre, located at South Bank, central London. The building was opened in 1976, replacing the company's temporary location at the Old Vic theatre. Photograph: David Samuel.

British theatre in a post-national era (cont.)

By Dan Rebellato

For this reason, they are sometimes given the unflattering nickname McTheatre. The connections between this form of theatremaking and the practices of global industrial capitalism are obvious.

It is not merely commercial theatre that has taken this approach, of course. The Royal Court Theatre in London is, undoubtedly, one of the most important theatres in Europe, responsible for commissioning and premiering perhaps hundreds of plays that have gone on to find a permanent place in the world repertoire. In the last twenty years it has understandably capitalised on this brand by setting up workshops in dozens of other cities across the whole world. At best these are opportunities for genuine cultural exchange – the Court has programmed several seasons of work from other countries – but at worst it can seem as if the Royal Court is sending its playwrights abroad to teach them how to write plays properly.

Within the United Kingdom, the geopolitical changes we have seen in the world have led to a number of changes to the very idea of a National Theatre. In 2006, the National Theatre of Scotland began operating, the culmination of at least 60 years of campaigning to have Scotland's national identity reflected in a theatre institution of its own. But, unlike its English cousin – indeed unlike almost all national theatres across the world – this is a theatre without a building. Instead, the National Theatre of Scotland commissions work in partnerships with existing companies and partner organisations, some of them not even Scottish, and allows its presence to be a weightless matter of branding and capital flows. The company thus exists as a pure idea, not tied to the nineteenth-century technology of a cumbersome theatre building.

The idea has caught on; last year a Welsh National Theatre was founded on similar lines and its influence has been visible in Nicholas Hytner's widely acclaimed reign as Artistic Director of the National Theatre of England, opening up more and more connections with other theatre groups and questioning quite

fundamentally how a national theatre can meaningfully reflect a nation unto itself.

And lastly there are the playwrights. Over the last quarter-century British theatre writing has become more and more cosmopolitan. By that I mean that whereas in 1980 one might have expected an exciting new play to be based in a recognisable Britain, placed in some kind of social context, addressing some immediate topic of current concern, in 2010 such plays were a rarity. Instead, it is far more likely that we represent our world through indirection, abstraction, metaphor and formal experiment.

I think of a play like Martin Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life* (1997) which comprises seventeen scenes all linked only by the name Anna, or variants of it. The lines of dialogue are not assigned to

particular characters; the locations are not given. Is this a single play? Or seventeen playlets? Is Anna one character? Or are there seventeen Annas?

This may seem like a recipe for deep theatrical frustration but its openness has allowed it to sweep through the world's theatres generating new interpretations, associations and productions wherever it goes. It was first performed upstairs at the Royal Court to audiences of less than 100 per night. In 2007 its first major professional revival in London was on the Lyttelton stage of the National Theatre, playing to over a 1,000 each performance. Simon Stephen's play *Pornography* (2007) is a series of scenes that can be performed in any order by any number of actors, and received its world premiere in Germany. We look beyond our narrow insularity to

find commonalities across the world.

For me, it is plays like this that have the best chance of capturing something of our contemporary world. And in part they do this through a kind of formal embracing of other world traditions (one can see hints of Michel Vinaver and Heiner Müller in the work, of Gertrude Stein and Stéphane Mallarmé) rather than insisting on British traditions of playwrighting. But in part they do this by displaying openness to that world: by creating a playtext that invites participation, collaboration, interpretation, wherever that may be. Much contemporary British writing seems to be trying to find a form that is not narrowly identified with nation but can be understood across the world, will find resonances everywhere, that may even come to point us towards a cosmopolitan consciousness.

This development could be seen as a natural response to a more globalised world, reflecting an admirable sense of innovation in British theatre. On the other hand, it could also be seen as a kind of revived nineteenth-centuryism, a squeamishness at admitting a British identity and a desire to lead the world, if not in imperialism, then through cultural imperialism, power at one remove. Maybe not even at such a remove: culture is less the distraction or relief from industry that it once was; modern work in Europe is about presentation, handling images and information, providing experiences, and telling stories. Work is more and more like culture, which means that culture entails influence, power and growth. Perhaps cultural work is a disguised form of British industrial self-assertion?

I think not, principally because despite the openness of these plays, they carry a distinctive British lilt to them; a characteristic set of emotional defences, a pleasure at the tracteries of our language, a certain ironic self-mockery in its laughter that the British have always delighted in. It seems to me that in its simultaneous Britishness and unBritishness, our theatre is looking hard at the erasure of national identity, asking more profoundly than most of our politicians what we will gain from the new geopolitical dispensation and what we will lose.

"It seems to me that in its simultaneous Britishness and unBritishness, our theatre is looking hard at the erasure of national identity."



New British wave. Director Martin Crimp (2nd from right) greeting the audience after staging his play *The City*, Paris, 13 February 2009.

Photograph: Raphaël Labbé

The British comedy revolution

By Lars Mjøen

When does the real *sense of humour* emerge in a young person? The one that shapes your character and outlook for the rest of your life, establishes intellectual affinities and measures out a healthy distance to the trivialities of daily life? Laughter is supposed to add to your good health – unless, of course, you laugh yourself to death at a young age.



Lars Mjøen is a comedian, actor, musician and author. He began his entertainment career in the public broadcast NRK in the 1970s. Mjøen is best known as a member of the prolific comedy trio KLM, alongside Trond Kirkoaga and Knut Lystad. With Kirkoaga and Lystad he made four classic television series about the absurd adventures of the three explorer brothers Brødrene Dal.

In my own case, I believe my sense of humour emerged somewhere in the 1960s. I was in my late teens at the time when I was first exposed to the new wave of absurd British comedy – a wave that would revolutionise the genre of comedy across the western world.

I had come of age towards the end of the Chat Noir era in Oslo. Leif Juster and Arve Opsahl were the comical heroes of the time, their punch lines dealing with drunken men, Enerhaugen, Einar Gerhardsen and what was *Mot norrmarkt*.

Then, in the second half of the 1960s, something started to change. Wesensteen had been to Britain and evidently snatched a few ideas from a set of up-and-coming comedians. This was long before any of the original sketches had been shown on television here in Norway. Anyhow, the impressions they had taken in changed the Norwegian comedy fundamentally. A new era brought radio and TV-shows like *Hørerøret*, *Lysthuset*, *Kunden har alltid rett*, *Og Takk for det*, *Supperådet*, *Feriebiskop*, *Fjertnes* and *Marve Fleksnes* to our attention. Rolv Wesenlund and Harald Heide-Steen became our Norwegian heroes. But where did they find their inspiration?

Among much else they must certainly from *The Goon Show* – the radio show involving Peter Sellers and the totally “insane” Spike Milligan; they must have seen *Beyond the Fringe*, the theatrical with Peter Cook and Dudley Moore (1962) and listened to their serialised radio show, *Not only but also...* where they created the characters Pete and Dud.

Rosenborg cinema, around 1967: Along with a friend I was there to see a screening of *Bedazzled*, with the aforementioned Cook and Moore. The film was about a man who sold his soul to the devil and was tempted by the seven deadly sins.

But to an audience nourished by the traditional Christian morals of the time, it was also about a new, absurd and thus fearless way of treating such a serious topic. We nearly laughed our heads off, even more so when discovering that we were among the very few who laughed. A different way of looking at the world emerged in the minds of two boys that evening, as well as a friendship sealed for life. Isn't humour a way of defining your shared understanding of life? And could one really be wholehearted “best friends” at all if not sharing each other's sense of it?

To me, that evening in Rosenborg cinema became a watershed, inspiring a dream to create similar things myself. That dream would later be accomplished, and in the meantime I sought out everything I could find of recent British comedy. I would soon pick my favourites in the game: John Cleese, Michael Palin, Terry Jones, Graham Chapman and Terry Gilliam. “This is the humour of my generation”, I felt at the time. And indeed, it was something that would leave a lasting impact on my own life.

With the exception of Woody Allen, there is no comedian or comedians who has mattered more to me than Monty Python's Flying Circus and their anarchistic-absurd satire, camouflaged as utter nonsense but containing a large share of deeply intelligent social commentary. This was the perfect mix to somebody who, as a young man, was in search of – yes, precisely – *The Meaning of Life*.

I cannot remember precisely when and where I saw the first programme of the Flying Circus. I can only remember that I was speechless thereafter! I had not dared to laugh throughout the programme for fear of losing any ingenious point, and when it was over (following two additional sketches after the end titles – how radical was that?!), the only thing I could utter was an overawed “Oh Bloody Hell!!!”

Since then I have enjoyed them all, again and again, at vinyl, CD, video cassette, DVD – never tiring of them; and how many comedians can you say that about?

For how could anyone forget *The Norwegian Blue*, *Ministry of Silly Walks*, *Nudge Nudge*, *The Argument Clinic*, *Leonardo and the Pope arguing over The Holy Communion with two Jesus's*, *Fawlty Towers*, *The Holy Grail*, not to mention the film that was honoured last year by British viewers as the funniest film ever: *Life of Brian*. “The film which is so funny that it was banned in Norway”, as the Swedes promoted it at the time. And

the debate which followed until it was finally legalised (with a warning that the film was certainly not about Jesus but about Brian) probably marked the beginning of the end of Norwegian film censorship as we knew it.

A common observation when seeing old comedies anew is that most of them fade quite quickly. Sometimes it is almost impossible to grasp why they really made you laugh in previous years. But some favourites survive.

I hope the Monty Python group have seen to it that re-runs of their old TV-shows are well paid. After more than forty years there is always a Python show on a

television channel near you, and not many years ago Eric Idle wrote *Spamalot*, the musical version of *The Holy Grail*, which still attracts large and exhilarated audiences in London.

Humour is about form, trends, age and shared references in addition to the required comical talent. An

“I cannot remember precisely when and where I saw the first programme of the Flying Circus. I can only remember that I was speechless thereafter!”

essential reason why different generations rarely understand each other's humour is that young people seek to demonstrate their independence of their parents. And, as with clothes and music, they do it with their own humour. After all, you cannot laugh at the same things as your Mum! I remember thinking precisely that while yawning as a sixteen-year-old in the venue of Chat Noir with my excited actress-mother watching Juster and Arve Opsahl on stage.

For there is no justice in this business: the old must succumb to the new, no matter if the former continues to deliver. At the end of the day, the audience demands change. Not necessarily for the better – as long as it is different!

A wise man once said: “People get the comedians they deserve”. Today, yet again, body liquids and genitals have gotten the upper hand over satire driven by political and social interest. Sketch-based comedy has been in decline for some time, perceived as too expensive, in favour of stand-up-comedy of American inspiration. One comedian, one microphone! Much less expensive to produce in times when ever larger profits are required by the owners of more and more commercial TV-networks.

But of course, this is my judgement only. Fortunately, humour is magnificently subjective at heart; only what I think is funny is really funny...!

The British invasion: the making of a modern myth

By Alwyn Turner

If one had to put a date on the birth of Britain's Swinging Sixties, the most plausible candidate is perhaps August 1956, with the London exhibition "This Is Tomorrow" that launched the Pop Art movement. And the key to British Pop Art was a fascination with the mass culture of America, with the imagery of Hollywood and Madison Avenue.

It was an infatuation that reflected its times. For a British population, emerging from an age of austerity (wartime rationing did not end until 1954, just a few short months before "Shake Rattle and Roll" by Bill and His Comets became the first rock and roll hit), the visions of conspicuous consumption in movies and magazines made America seem like a fabled land of plenty. Pop Art was the first creative expression of that attitude, the first attempt to remake and remodel American culture, giving it a specifically British spin, adding a sense of wit and experimentation, a necessarily ironic take born of distance from the source material.

The same slightly tongue-in-cheek embrace of America lay at the heart of British pop music in the early 1960s, as a generation of art school students – John Lennon, Pete Townsend, Ray Davies – took the sounds that came over the Atlantic and created their own collaged impression of what rock and roll could be. "They put together the rockabilly scene", said Roger McGuinn of the Byrds, talking about the Beatles. "They mixed it with blues and bossa nova and classical and all kinds of influences. They kind of made a stew of all these different forms of music." They also added a visual literacy that ultimately resulted in the most famous work of Pop Art, Peter Blake's design for the cover of the Sgt Pepper album (1967).

What had changed in the years since "This Is Tomorrow" was the growing affluence of Britain. Harold Macmillan's "You've never had it so good" might still have left the country lagging some way behind America, but there was now at least the possibility of competition, and the idea of British artists finding an audience in the States no longer seemed as implausible as once it had. By the early years of the 1960s a number of photographers were making



Alwyn Turner is the author of Crisis? What Crisis? Britain in the 1970s and Rejoice! Rejoice! Britain in the 1980s. Other books include Halfway to Paradise and My Generation, documenting the first two decades of British rock and roll. His most recent book, The Man Who Invented the Daleks, is published this spring by Aurum Press.

their names in the international fashion industry, the new wave of cinema was securing Oscar nominations and critics were talking about the "British domination of Broadway", with hit plays, revues and musicals transferring effortlessly from London. (Ironically one of the few failures was a 1963 exhibition in New York of British Pop Art.)

And then came the Beatles. Having conquered their homeland in 1963, the group released "I Want to Hold Your Hand" in America in January 1964, visited the country the following month and, by the end of March, held all top five places in the US singles charts, accounting for 60 per cent of all record sales. In a society still reeling from the shock of President Kennedy's assassination, their cheerful simplicity swept all before them. In their wake came a host of other bands, from the Dave Clark Five to the Rolling Stones, and where the previous year had seen just one British record in the American top ten ("Telstar" by the Tornados), the figure rose to 34 in 1964. Thus was born the British Invasion.

Artistically the major contribution was the expansion of what had been an exclusively teenage tradition. The best of the British bands suggested that rock and roll was about more than soda pop and high school hops, offering an overtly aesthetic sensibility in opposition to the folk traditions that had originally spawned rock and roll. What had been restricted to the grubby pages of the weekly pop press now found itself welcome in the glossy world of the colour supplements, with mainstream critics on hand to endorse the significance of it all.

There was too a financial dimension, the export earnings of pop recognized in the award of MBEs to the Beatles in 1965. It was, however, only a brief moment of triumph and, for all the originality on display, was ultimately dependent on selling a very limited vision of Britain. The Union Jack imagery of the Who, the Edwardian uniforms of

Sgt Pepper, the music hall anachronism of Herman's Hermits' biggest hit "I'm Henry VIII, I Am" – all spoke of a country steeped in its own past, in the same way that the biggest television exports of the era (The Saint and The Avengers) purveyed a more or less jokey self-parody of Englishness.

In the absence of such instantly recognisable symbols, when the next generation of art school acts – David Bowie, Roxy Music, T Rex – created glam rock in the early-1970s, they met with a markedly diminished level of acceptance in the States. The self-conscious artifice, the intellectualism and the playing with sexual imagery shared the same roots as the earlier bands, but proved a much more difficult sell to an America that, faced with recession, with defeat in Vietnam and with the Watergate scandal, was anyway becoming increasingly inward-looking.

The memory of that moment in the mid-1960s became one of Britain's great myths. In the 1990s, as the country took stock of what it had lost during the years of Margaret Thatcher, it looked – as ever – to the past for images that might reassure. There were inevitably evocations of the Second World War, particularly with the 50th anniversary of VE Day, but it was the ghosts of the Swinging Sixties that shaped the new decade, with Brit Pop, the Young British Artists and the movies of Danny Boyle. The echoes were reinforced by the emergence of a young Labour leader after a long period of Conservative government (Harold Wilson seemingly reincarnated as Tony Blair) and by Euro 96, the first major football tournament to be staged on British soil since the 1966 World Cup.

This time, though, there was an active rejection of America, with the likes of Suede and Blur deliberately setting themselves up in opposition to American culture. And, for the most part, the States responded in kind: the most successful bands of the Brit Pop era were Oasis, who allowed no trace of art school pretension to sully their revivalism, and Radiohead, the least British and the least pop of them all. In Britain there felt, briefly, as though there were a new cultural movement; from an American standpoint, there were merely isolated moments.

The conditions that created that 1960s phenomenon, specifically the post-war infatuation with American culture, is unlikely to be repeated. Its legacy, however, continues to be felt, not only in the permanent transformation it achieved in rock music, but also in the creation of another chapter to add to the British folk memory of past glories.



Conquest of America. The Beatles on arrival at John F. Kennedy International Airport, New York, 7 February 1964.

English football - a benign global dictator?

By John Williams

Enterprise and expansion.

In English football circles the mad scramble to be *the* international sporting brand is now taken as read. Annual figures are produced by the UK-based financial analysts Deloitte which show that top level English club football may sometimes struggle to attract the largest average crowds (Germany does better) or to recruit the very best of the world's elite players (Spain has an obvious claim), but when it comes to global reach, merchandise sales and international fan bases then it is difficult to argue the case with the giants of the English Premier League. Only Barcelona and Real Madrid can rival the international influence of English clubs, which means that the English game is an engine for global sports culture.



John Williams is a senior lecturer at the Dept of Sociology, University of Leicester. His research interests include sports identities and football fan culture. He has contributed a broad range of publications on these topics, such as *Football Nation: Stories from Sixty Years of the Game* (Bloomsbury, 2010).

is very new of course and it defines a very different relationship to the one that existed historically between England and the rest of the football world. When FIFA was established in 1904, initially the home federations – England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales – refused to join the new international accord. As originators of the modern game, the British kept tight control over the laws of football and so saw no reason to share its expertise or good will with “foreigners”. Both the British Foreign Office and the Football Association were concerned that the amateur ethos underpinning the English game, of fair play and the values of (public school-educated) “gentleman” might be sullied by too much fraternisation abroad. They also worried that sport and politics would become intimate bedfellows – and their fears were partially realised, of course, in the events of the 1930s.

So before 1946 the British were intermittent members only of the official international football order and England had never played in the World Cup finals. Their relative isolation was to prove costly, as first Hungary (in 1953 and 1954) and then the emerging South American football powers showed the English just what they had been missing. And football humiliation occurred at a moment of a wider political and cultural crisis for Britain about their role and status in the world. Against this backdrop, an England World Cup win on home soil in 1966 brightened the domestic mood and in the 1970s and 1980s English clubs – crucially drawing on British playing resources – could still power their way to European success. But off the field the mood was darkening. As hooliganism tightened its grip in Britain, ironically it was continental Europe which now decided it had had just about enough of the ways of so-called English “gentleman”.

In this troubled era the main commercial advantage that a locally-owned club such as Manchester United had over its smaller English rivals was a home stadium that could accommodate 60,000 fans, compared to say 20,000 at Fulham or Wimbledon. Almost all the important income taken by English

clubs in the 1980s came directly through the turnstiles – and some of this had to be shared with visitors. This fraternal cross-subsidisation – a kind of “authoritarianism for the poor” – was a central feature of the history of the English professional game until the formation of the FA Premier League in 1992 blew it apart. Embracing neo-liberal, free market principles for the first time and extolling the virtues of globalisation over any sort of protectionism – football was essentially a business after all – the English club game was soon transformed.

Money from BSkyB ignited the English football revolution in the 1990s, but it is the increasing presence of international investors in England which has accelerated its global cultural creep. Around half of all Premier League clubs are now foreign-owned. Regulations which argue that sport is not just business, in Italy, Spain and Germany, effectively prevent the same thing happening in those countries. The Premier League today is also awash with international stars, meaning that every intrusion into foreign living rooms or bars is also a celebration of cross-national penetration. Accordingly, the presence of Michael Essien and Didier Drogba at Chelsea and Dimitar Berbatov and Park Ji-Sung at Manchester United, for example, is also an international cultural celebration of Ghana, the Ivory Coast, Bulgaria and South Korea respectively. In terms of promoting positive international relations, claims Arsenal's French coach Arsene Wenger, football is far ahead of politics.

So where is the down side? For one thing the looting by English clubs of smaller international leagues for star players means that clubs from France, Holland, Eastern Europe and even Germany have fewer chances of winning the top club prize, the Champions League. Teenage stars are now ripped out of their local contexts and routinely transported for a punt in England, where cries of “mercenary” greet every new record-breaking player salary deal. As a result, the hyper-ventilating elite English game is awash with debt: 56% of all the debt in European football in 2010. New UEFA rules are aimed at curbing this “financial doping”. The England national team has also suffered in the deep shade cast by the global roster of Premier League stars.

Finally, the global cultural and financial reach of the Premier League necessarily stifles local innovation and national difference. And for all the post-modern talk about prizing the sporting “glocal”, football surely should be as much a celebration of national *difference* as it is an emblem of the fact that such differences have been overcome in friendly sporting combat.

Or perhaps more accurately, Premier League football is now the world's most recognisable visual sporting muzak. Travel almost anywhere today around the world and it is almost impossible to escape its clammy yet seductive reach. Beyond the committed few enthusiasts who are huddled around their public flat-screens, English football is mainly comforting background noise in any crowded pub from the frozen north of Europe, to some of Africa's heartlands, and into Australasia's booming sports bars. Outside these venues, meanwhile, local kids typically play their pick-up soccer games wearing locally produced scalped versions of Manchester United, Chelsea, Liverpool or Arsenal shirts. Liverpool FC may be suffering a domestic slump in their form on the pitch, but global shirt sales of its recently departed Spanish striker Fernando Torres top all rivals.

So, more importantly in commercial terms at least, the internet and satellite technology which now carries images of the Premier League tens of thousands of miles can also harness these committed global followers or casual TV grazers alike for a crucial financial return. When Manchester United claims its own TV channel reaches 190 million “fans” worldwide today it is doing much more than mere breast-beating or proclaiming the club's global popularity. There is big money to be made in image rights and merchandising around global sport and it is the English who largely lead the way.

Much of this global interaction



Theatre of dreams. Old Trafford, the home of Manchester United, England's most successful football club over the last two decades.

The British film industry: creativity and constraint

By Sarah Barrow

With Tom Hooper's stirring period piece, *The King's Speech*, nominated for a clutch of Oscars in the forthcoming awards ceremony and its star Colin Firth basking in long deserved Hollywood glory, British cinema is once again in the spotlight.



Dr. Sarah Barrow is head of Lincoln School of Media, University of Lincoln. Her research explores identities and the relationship between national and transnational in cinema. She has also analysed systems of film funding and the dynamic between cinema and social conflict.

After a year which saw the release of a surprising number of cinematic gems, many observers have even gone so as to argue that film made in the UK is on a high. On the one hand, films from Mike Leigh and Clio Barnard have made the Sight & Sound "best of 2010" world cinema list, while on the more commercial end of the spectrum, the Harry Potter franchise is about to receive an outstanding contribution to cinema prize from BAFTA for having drawn global attention to the range of expertise within the British craft and technical industries and for having made more than \$5.4 billion worldwide.

Nevertheless, 2010 was also the year that saw the entire UK infrastructure for film finance and support suffer a seismic shift thanks to the priorities of a new political regime, after a decade or so during which tax credits and the like had allowed a number of new initiatives to emerge and given rise to a relative golden age for screen culture.

For while British cinema has long been celebrated for its diversity of style and subject matter, in the last few years alone, the breadth and depth of work to appear, much of which has been critically acclaimed and achieved commercial success, has been quite astounding. For example, new talent Andrea Arnold has impressed critics and audiences with lyrical urban surprises such as *Red Road* and *Fish Tank*, sharing a distinctive edgy vision with Scottish filmmaker Lynne Ramsay whose best known work *Ratcatcher* was winning awards and attracting critical attention back in 2000. Meanwhile, cross-over artists such as "establishment-troubling" Steve McQueen and Sam Taylor-Wood have offered captivating portrayals of figures as diverse as IRA hunger striker Bobby Sands (in *Hunger*) and John Lennon (*Nowhere Boy*). Elsewhere, the singular voice of Shane Meadows has given us his own brand of heartbreaking yet hilarious melancholy set amidst political turmoil in working-class Britain with films such as *Room for Romeo Brass* and *This is England*.

And yet there can be no denying that the immediate future looks very uncertain for British cinema as the political changes of 2010 begin to make their mark, and in particular as the effects of the winding down of the UK Film Council are felt. Back in May 2010, on the very day after the last General Election and when the Lib-Con Coalition was still to be formed, *Guardian* journalist and blogger Danny Leigh predicted a merger between the British Film Institute and the Film Council, "with its overtones of slashed funding and uncomfortable bottom lines" and warned of the dark consequences of cutting tax credits and other support systems for film-makers. At particular threat are the newest film-makers who have yet to establish a reputation that would make them interesting to potential private funders. Having found it hard enough to make the current system work for them, these low budget independents are now faced with a total lack of central infrastructure.

In fact, there has been no merger as such. The Film Council – amongst the first wave of organisations to be cut by the new government in July 2010 – will have disappeared in less than two years and, while opinion is divided as to whether that loss will be sorely felt by all in the longer term, it has to be acknowledged that almost all of the films named so far in this piece, and a great many more (900 since the Council's creation in 2000) have been supported by a body which has invested over £160m of Lottery

funding and helped to generate over £700 million at the box office worldwide.

Arguably more serious for the nurturing of new and ambitious cinema, has been the subsequent demise of the Regional Screen Agencies which has come as quite a blow for those based away from the metropolis and who have enjoyed a wide range of support from these organisations. In their place, a new quango has emerged: Creative England – promoted by Ed Vaizey, the Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries as "a simpler, more efficient structure with an expanded remit to support the creative industries across England." In other words, its remit is to do much more with far fewer resources. It is supposed to ensure an England-wide delivery network for film, based around three strategic territorial hubs – North (Manchester); Central (Birmingham) and South (Bristol) – chosen for their reputations as regional centres for creative industry impact.

It is hoped that these new hubs will continue to deliver the range of services in funding, production, locations, skills, training, audience development, education and exhibition that have been provided by the regional screen agencies. On lean staffing structures, those agencies have helped to identify and develop new talent around the country and even now are bringing together new partners to set up projects such as the Kickstart internship initiative for final year media undergraduates at University of Lincoln. These students are the lucky ones, but what the future holds for those who still want to forge a career in cinema is anyone's guess. Already, the struggle to become successful in film-making in the UK is enormous – most of the directors named in this piece were over 40 before they began to achieve recognition for their work and had already established their name in the fields of fine art, advertising or TV presenting.

What is clear is that 2011 will be a year of transition as the Regional Screen Agencies reform into Creative England, and the UK Film Council winds down. If funding streams dry up as expected, whole projects may be jeopardised and careers put on hold. On the other hand, the fresh turmoil and uncertainty might give rise to the welcome return of a more politicised independent screen culture that embraces ambition, risk-taking and experimentation, and inspires an even greater diversity of themes and styles. Meanwhile, the expertise of British film cast and crew continue to be of great interest to producers around the world.

"The immediate future looks very uncertain for British cinema as the political changes of 2010 begin to make their mark."



Interpreting an era. Film poster from Shane Meadows' acclaimed *This is England* (2006), set in the early 1980s.

The state and cultural policy in Britain

By Clive Gray

Diversity and fragility.

Probably the most telling point about the relationship of the British state to cultural policy is that Britain does not actually have a cultural policy in any sense that Scandinavian readers would recognise.



Clive Gray is a reader in cultural policy at Leicester Business School, De Montfort University. He has published widely on the interaction between politics and the cultural domain. Among his books are The Politics of the Arts in Britain (Macmillan, 2000).

For a variety of political and social reasons the usual attitude of the British state towards cultural issues has tended to be to ignore them for as long as possible, and then to do as little as possible to actually resolve them. The consequence of this has been that the cultural policy sector as a whole is divided in organisational, policy and economic terms, with no detailed central direction or control of a fragmented and highly complex network of actors.

To demonstrate this lack of explicit control of the cultural policy system one could refer to any of its' component parts – ranging from architecture to museums, libraries to sport, or computer games to heritage, for example.

Control of the arts, for example, is fragmented across a range of actors within the system: overall responsibility for the system in England rests with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), which is not a significantly important Department as far as central government is concerned. The most important function of the DCMS would appear to be to act as the intermediary between the Treasury, which holds the purse-strings, and the large number of quasi-autonomous agencies (known as quangos) responsible for actually distributing the money: in the case of the arts this is through Arts Council England.

At best, the DCMS provides general policy direction to the system by making broad policy statements which then need to be turned in to effective action by this plethora of quangos. The reluctance of the DCMS to intervene actively in these decisions allows for some effective autonomy from direct party political control of the arts, and also lets the DCMS evade responsibility for the decisions that are then made. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland similar relationships exist between the Parliament/Assemblies and their own arts quangos.

A second important source of direction within the arts system rests with local authorities which have a statutory duty to provide libraries, and a discretionary duty to support the arts and culture. Even in Scotland and Northern Ireland, where these duties are statutory, there are major differences between local authorities in terms of levels of service provision and the types of services that are provided. In England and Wales, where discretion applies, these differences are multiplied greatly. The absence of a national cultural policy means that local authorities are free to make their own choices about arts provision, and to create their own arts policies altogether, which has been more enthusiastically pursued in some places (such as Birmingham) than in others.

In the case of museums almost identical considerations apply: the DCMS, Scottish Parliament and Welsh/Northern Irish Assemblies act as money-shifting devices between the respective Treasuries and either national quangos (in England, for example, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council; in Scotland, Museums Galleries Scotland), or individual museums (the "nationals", such as the National Gallery, the British Museum, and the Tate Galleries). Local authorities in England can also support local museums. This, notably, is, again, a discretionary rather than statutory function, leading to wide differences between parts of the country as to how enthusiastically museums are maintained.

A final component of the overall system for managing cultural activities in Britain lies in other major financial resources provided through the National Lottery and charitable donations. The arts, sports and heritage are, between them, given 50% of the profits

arising from the Lottery, with this money being distributed through the quango system. In the case of the arts, lottery support amounts to approximately one-quarter of the money that Arts Council England provides in total to the arts. The major private source of organised philanthropy for the arts in Britain is provided by Arts and Business which raises about 1% of the total spent by Arts Council England, but is largely funded (approximately 80% of its' income) by the four UK Arts Councils, and is thus largely just another state device used for funding purposes.

"For many parts of the cultural sector in Britain. For many aspects of culture the private sector has always been, and remains, the dominant source of financial support."

The emphasis that has been placed on state funding is slightly unfair for many parts of the cultural sector in Britain. For many aspects of culture the private sector has always been, and remains, the dominant source of financial support that exists, and even the heavily subsidised Royal Opera House raises over 35% of its' income through

the box office. These funds come in many forms, even if voluntary donations to culture are dealt with much less favourably through tax mechanisms than in the United States, for example. Compared with the European mainland, the wider role of the state in supporting the cultural economy directly or indirectly is less pivotal: even the cultural industries sector has now fallen from grace for the DCMS following the arrival of the new coalition government.

While it is still too soon to be entirely clear as to the approach that the coalition will be taking towards large parts of the cultural sector there is no doubt that hard times are coming. The funding agreements that the Labour Party introduced for large parts of the cultural sector are due to end in 2011, and cuts in future levels of grant-aid to not only quangos, but also to local authorities have already been announced. Given that culture is largely a discretionary activity for local authorities there is reason to assume that there will be even heavier cuts to these services than will be imposed on statutory services such as education, with some local authorities already proposing to shut some of their museums, for example. Whether the "big society" will provide an adequate replacement for the support that the British state currently, if somewhat patchily, provides for culture remains to be seen. Overall it is likely that the grudging role of the state in this sphere is going to be severely tested in the immediate future.



Culture policy from constrained public finances. Prime Minister David Cameron and TV producer Phil Redmond in Liverpool, July 2010. Crown copyright © The Prime Minister's Office

Creativity, culture and regeneration

By Nicholas Clifton

Creative growth? It has recently been claimed that the UK creative and cultural industries sector is now comparable in size with the financial services sector, comprises more than 7% of the UK economy, is growing at twice the rate of any other UK sector; and employs 1.8m people.



Nicholas Clifton is a reader in economic geography and regional development at Cardiff School of Management. His main research interests lie in the fields of regional economics, business strategy, innovation and creativity.

Much recent interest has drawn upon the idea that in the new “knowledge economy” cities that display a high quality of place - meaning the presence of artists and musicians, high levels of tolerance and diversity, and other manifestations of a vibrant cultural life - perform better economically than those which do not. Consequently culture has been positioned at the centre of many urban policies, though the efficacy of this remains contested; particularly with regard to the rather “instrumental” usage of culture and simplistic understanding of the various drivers of economic success.

As such, the British government has drawn explicitly on recent research about cultural and creative networks, such as Richard Florida’s *The Rise of the Creative Class* (Basic Books, 2002). Sometimes seen as a quintessentially New Labour project, this interest has if anything increased following the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition elected in 2010. As a counterbalance, some commentators have sought to temper the view that the concept of “creativity”, and its enhancement, represents either a higher form of development or more of a “policy panacea” than previous prescriptions.

Table 1 shows the top and bottom ten locations in England and Wales for the presence of the “creative core” of knowledge workers. As might be expected, localities in the west-of-London M4 corridor area feature heavily in the top ten. Alongside, a number of less obvious regional centres of creativity emerge - Manchester in the north west (Trafford lying just to the west of the city centre with Manchester itself ranked only 4 places below at 14), Newcastle in the north east, and not least Cardiff. Finally, our rankings confirm the position of Brighton and Hove as a creative centre. Turning attention to the bottom ten UAs, a number of these are places suffering the protracted after-effects of the loss of heavy industry, either as distinct localities (Blaenau Gwent, Stoke on

Table 1: Creative Core Location by Unitary Authority / County

Top 10 Localities	(LQ)	Bottom 10 Localities	(LQ)
1. Wokingham	1.46	1. Barnsley	0.63
2. Reading	1.42	2. Tameside	0.62
3. Cardiff	1.39	3. N.E. Lincolnshire	0.61
4. Oxfordshire	1.34	4. Knowsley	0.60
5. London	1.33	5. Kingston upon Hull	0.58
6. Newcastle	1.32	6. Sandwell	0.57
7. Cambridgeshire	1.31	7. Thurrock	0.56
8. Brighton & Hove	1.31	8. Blackpool	0.52
9. Windsor & Maidenhead	1.31	9. Blaenau Gwent	0.51
10. Trafford	1.27	10. Stoke on Trent	0.49

Source: derived from Census of Population 2001

Trent, Barnsley) or the de-industrialised areas of large cities such as Tameside (Manchester), Knowsley (Liverpool) and Sandwell (Birmingham). These localities typically lack internal capacity, facing a long-standing and often deeply embedded mixture of social, economic, and environmental problems such as:

- a tradition of heavy industry and of large firm dominance that gives a narrow economic base and a vulnerability both to short-term employment shocks and long term economic decline;
- a weak local tradition of entrepreneurship and small independent enterprise;
- long-standing, high unemployment, particularly amongst young people and older men;
- the paradox of skill shortages in certain key sectors through an inability to attract and retain the necessary human capital;
- a history of under investment and continuing deterioration in the natural and built environment with special problems in the area of housing;
- mixed multi-ethnic populations as a result of previous waves of immigration before the advent of decline

Overall, the spatial focus of creative industry policy in the UK has centred on the role of cities and city-regions, with



Bridge to prosperity. Newcastle has succeeded in constructing a creative and vibrant city from a previous industrial era. Photograph: Rob Bishop.

the core metropolitan arena seen as the key for developing and enhancing “creative clusters”. A distinct advantage of city-regions is considered to be their ability to produce, attract and retain those workers who play the lead role in knowledge-intensive production and innovation. These provide the ideas, creativity and imagination so crucial to economic success. However, by its very nature such a policy focus begs the question as to what

the fate might be of those localities which are not at the mainstream of the creative economy. This is particularly true for the kind of old industrial locations described above which are endowed with lower concentrations of cultural industries and creative workers, and thus lower levels of “cultural opportunity”.

Although the link between the creative class, culture, competitiveness, and growth can, and will, continue to be debated, the crux of the matter from a UK competitiveness perspective is to ensure fair access to economic opportunity across the nation as a whole. In the current economic (and policy) climate, it is increasingly difficult to see how this will happen; although many lagging places do possess a tradition of loyalty to the locality and a strong spirit of community together with well-established traditions of partnership and association, they essentially lack the endogenous capacity to reconnect themselves with the growth poles of the UK economy.

This situation will inevitably be exacerbated by the coming cuts in central government departmental budgets over the next 4 years; the most pertinent being Local Government down by 27%, Communities by 51%, and Culture, Media and Sport 24% (all in excess of the average 19% reduction in revenue spending across all departments). Moreover, at a time when place matters as much if not more than it did before, the disbanding of the regional development agencies (RDAs) in 2010 England and their replacement by Local Enterprise Partnerships adds another level of uncertainty to the picture. Culture and creativity cannot in themselves create employment. Regeneration also requires the mobilisation of more tangible resources to encourage the process. In the current situation, difficult times are ahead for aspiring creative localities.

Harry Potter's moral choices

By Einar Bjorvand

Fantasy and moral.

By an interesting coincidence, two of the most popular authors during the last two decades both reside in Edinburgh: J.K. Rowling and Alexander McCall Smith.



Einar Bjorvand is an associate professor at the Dept of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages, University of Oslo. His research interests cover the Early Modern Period, the early English novel and fantasy literature.

Another interesting fact about these two authors is that however different they may be in terms of genre and style of writing, both authors are deeply concerned with moral issues. It has to be said though that while McCall Smith is charmingly preoccupied with the moral issues and dilemmas that we encounter every day, Rowling, as a writer of fantasy fiction, is concerned with the greater, more fundamental and existential issues that are so characteristic of that genre.

In a pseudo-Christian manner, Rowling's series about Harry Potter starts out with the birth of a small child, a birth which is preceded by a prophecy which indicates that the salvation of all mankind depends upon the actions of this one child, which has in some vague sense been "chosen". The future of his world depends upon his willingness to accept the quest and to carry it through, in spite of increasing suffering and hardships which will finally seemingly land him in the role of a "sacrificial lamb".

Another prophecy has certainly come true. It is expressed by Professor McGonagall in the very first volume: "He'll be famous - a legend - I wouldn't be surprised if today was known as Harry Potter Day in future - there will be books written about Harry - every child in our world will know his name!" (p. 15).

Indeed, the prophecy seems to have come true even in the world of Muggles. The seven books about Harry Potter probably

represent the biggest blockbuster that the world of children's literature has ever seen. Teenage boys who would not normally be seen anywhere near a book, would pick up a volume of more than 700 pages and not seem able to stop reading. The publishers had to market separate editions in neutral hardcovers so that an increasing number of adult readers could indulge themselves without embarrassment.

Fantasy literature depends on and makes use of the dominant myths and mythologies of our culture and civilization. Fantasy literature builds, at least partly, on our deep-seated wish to transcend the boundaries of our human existence, to command the elements and the laws of nature. These deeply rooted desires are reflected in our common myths, and these are made use of by the writers of fantasy literature.

The magical world of fantasy literature presents the reader with a world of dreams. When Harry Potter is set free from his "prison" in "the cupboard under the stairs" and passes through the portal at platform 9 ³/₄ at King's Cross station, the Hogwart Express takes him to the dream-world of fantasy, where, provided you know the right words or formula, you can make marvellous things happen; and, of course, it is this magical, almost medieval world that carries much of the attraction. It is a world without electricity where modern technology has been replaced by the wand.

In the final analysis, however, it is a question, not of the presence of magical gadgets and creatures, but of the hero's willingness to accept the quest and his ability to show the courage and perseverance necessary to complete his momentous task. Thus the books carry the unmistakable mark of western humanism. Rowling utilises western myths and legends to tell a familiar story about man and his ability to find the

source of his strength and happiness inside himself.

J.K. Rowling's novels have been accused (by A.S. Byatt) of being derivative. While this is to a certain extent true, it is also an unfair accusation. As a writer of fantasy fiction, Rowling has to follow the laws of the genre; and although she borrows freely from the boarding-school novel and from earlier fantasy literature, there is a wealth of inventive and delightful details, and not least, wonderful instances of humour and comedy, so conspicuously lacking in the works of her formidable forerunner, J.R.R. Tolkien.

The Harry Potter novels start out as high fantasy. That is to say, through various portals (a train platform, a wall in a tavern,

"Rowling utilises western myths and legends to tell a familiar story about man and his ability to find the source of his strength and happiness inside himself."

a telephone booth) we enter into a parallel world, a world that is closed or invisible to non-magical people (Muggles). But since Rowling's (or, rather Harry Potter's) world, unlike Lewis's Narnia and Tolkien's Middle-earth, exists very much as a part of this world, she is often tempted to mix high fantasy with low fantasy, i.e. the world of magic is allowed

to appear undisguised in the world of reality and vice versa. To a traditionalist in fantasy literature, this is somewhat disturbing. No doubt, this mixing of the two worlds is related to Rowling's strong desire to express her social criticism. Her social satire makes itself felt throughout the series, and her main targets seem to be consumerism, sensational journalism, over-sized bureaucracy, and racial or social prejudice.

Rowling's message, and she does have a message, is clearly that we all have the powers of good and evil inside us; the question is whom we choose to be and what values we choose to uphold.

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Forthcoming edition of British Politics Review

Multiculturalism is a much debated concept in politics these days. As an approach to multicultural societies today, it has a particular political flavour. Yet it is also a much more generic term: in Britain, for example, the issue of how to accommodate immigration and the co-existence of different ethnic groups within one society, is an age-old debate.

In the next issue of *British Politics Review*, we investi-

gate multiculturalism from a British point of view. More specifically, we will look closer at post-war immigration to Britain, political approaches to integration, the significance of religion to different groups in British society and whether the "flexible" labour market in Britain has been conducive to the mixing of ethnic groups.

Finally, what does austerity and a change of government mean for the way

inter-cultural relations will be approached in the years to come?

As always, the Review will draw upon articles both from political, academic and journalistic sources. Contributions from readers of *British Politics Review* are very welcome.

The spring edition of *British Politics Review* is due to arrive in May 2011.