

16+

Study Guide



SITCOM

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16+ MEDIA STUDIES

INFORMATION GUIDE STATEMENT

“Candidates should note that examiners have copies of this guide and will not give credit for mere reproduction of the information it contains. Candidates are reminded that all research sources must be credited”.

INTRODUCTION

ACCESSING RESEARCH MATERIALS

1. bfi NATIONAL LIBRARY

All the materials referred to in this guide are available for consultation at the bfi National Library. If you wish to visit the reading room of the library and do not already hold membership, you will need to take out a one-day, five-day or annual pass. Full details of access to the library and charges can be found at www.bfi.org.uk/library

Bfi National Library Reading Room Opening Hours

Monday	10.30am - 5.30pm
Tuesday	10.30am - 8.00pm
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Thursday	10.30am - 8.00pm
Friday	10.30am - 5.30pm

If you are visiting the library from a distance or are planning to visit as a group, it is advisable to contact the Reading Room librarian in advance (tel. 020 7957 4824, or email library@bfi.org.uk).

bfi National Library
British Film Institute
21 Stephen Street
London W1T 1LN
Tel. 020 7255 1444
www.bfi.org.uk/library

The library's nearest underground stations are Tottenham Court Road and Goodge Street (please see www.bfi.org.uk/library/visiting for a map of the area).

COPIES OF ARTICLES

If you are unable to visit the library or would like materials referred to in this guide sent to you, the bfi Information Service can supply copies of articles via its Research Services. Research is charged at a range of hourly rates, with a minimum charge for half an hour's research – full details of services and charges can be found at

www.bfi.org.uk/library/services/research.html

For queries about article copying or other research, please contact Information Services at the above address or telephone number, or post your enquiry online at

www.bfi.org.uk/ask

2. OTHER SOURCES

• **Your local library**

Local libraries should have access to the inter-library loan system for requesting items they do not hold and they may have copies of MONTHLY FILM BULLETIN and SIGHT AND SOUND. Some recent newspaper items may be held by your local reference library. Larger libraries will hold other relevant materials and should offer internet access.

• **Your nearest college/university**

Universities may allow access to outside students, though you may not be able to borrow books or journals. Ask your reference librarian, who should be able to assist by locating the nearest college library holding suitable material. The BFI Film and Television Handbook lists libraries with significant media collections.

• **Your school library**

• **Local bookshops**

Some of the books mentioned in the bibliography will be in print and your bookshop should be able to order items for you.

• **The British Library Newspaper Library**

The Newspaper Library will have all the newspaper items referred to in this guide. Contact the library first if you wish to visit. 16+ students under the age of 18 will need to make an appointment.

The British Library Newspaper Library
Colindale Avenue
London NW9 5HE
Tel. 020 7412 7353

Why do research?

You cannot simply rely on your existing knowledge when approaching essays in Media Studies. Although you will have some understanding of the area being explored, it is not enough to enable you to examine the area in depth. If you were asked to write about the people in your street in detail, you might have some existing information about names, faces, relationships, issues and activities but this knowledge would not offer you details such as every single one of their names, who knows who, who gets on with whom, how people earn a living, what has happened to them in the past and so on. This extra information could change your opinions quite dramatically. Without it, therefore, your written profile would end up being quite shallow and possibly incorrect. The same is true of your understanding of media texts, issues and institutions.

Before researching any area, it is useful to be clear about what outcomes you are hoping to achieve. Research is never a waste of time, even when it doesn't directly relate to the essay you are preparing. The information may be relevant to another area of the syllabus, be it practical work or simply a different essay. Also, the picture you are building up of how an area works will strengthen your understanding of the subject as a whole. So what outcomes are you hoping to achieve with your research?

- **Abroad overview of the area you are researching:** This includes its history, institutions, conventions and relationship to the audience. Research into these aspects offers you an understanding of how your area has developed and the influences which have shaped it.
- **An awareness of different debates which may exist around the area of study:** There are a range of debates in many subject areas. For example, when researching audiences you will discover that there is some debate over how audiences watch television or film, ranging from the passive consumption of values and ideas to the use of media texts in a critical and independent way. Any discussion about censorship, for example, and an analysis of the debates which emerged over the release of the film "Crash", will be extremely shallow if you have no knowledge of these different perspectives.
- **Some knowledge of the work of theorists in that particular area:** You need to demonstrate that you have read different theorists, exploring the relevant issues and investigating the area thoroughly in order to develop your own opinion based on acquired knowledge and understanding.

- **Information relevant to all key concept areas.** You should, after research, be able to discuss all key concept areas as they relate to that specific subject area. These are the codes and conventions, representation, institutions and audience.

Types Of Research

- **Primary:** This is first-hand research. In other words, it relies on you constructing and conducting surveys, setting up interviews with key people in the media industry or keeping a diary or log of data (known as quantitative information) on such things as what activities women are shown doing in advertisements over one week of television viewing, for example. Unless you are equipped to conduct extensive research, have access to relevant people in the media industry or are thorough in the up-keep of your diary or log, this type of research can be demanding, complex and sometimes difficult to use. Having said that, if you are preparing for an extended essay, then it is exactly this type of research which, if well used, will make your work distinctive and impressive.
- **Secondary:** This is where you will be investigating information gathered by other people in books, pamphlets, on radio, television, in the newspaper and in magazines. All of these sources are excellent for finding background information, statistics, interviews, collected research details and so on. This will form the majority of your research. Some of these will be generally available (in public libraries for example); others such as press releases and trade press may only be available through specialist libraries.
- **Internet – World Wide Web sources** are also mainly secondary. You need to be able to make comparisons between sources if you intend quoting the information, and be wary of the differences between fact and opinions. Don't necessarily assume something is a fact just because someone on a website says it is. Some websites will be "official", but many will not be and you need to think about the difference this could make to information you find on them. Websites sometimes disappear or shift location – make sure you can quote the URL reference for them, and possibly keep a note of the last date you checked a particular site.

- **Other Media:** When considering one area of the media or one particular product or type of product, it is very important that you compare it with others which are similar. You will need to be able to refer to these comparisons in some detail so it is not enough to simply watch a film. You will need to read a little about that film, make notes, concentrate on one or two scenes which seem particularly relevant and write all of this information up so that you can refer to it when you need to.
- **History and development:** Having an understanding of the history and development of the media text which you are researching will provide a firm foundation and context for contemporary analysis. There is a difference between generally accepted facts and how theorists use these facts.
- **Theory:** This is the body of work of other critics of the media. Most of the books and periodical articles which you will read for research will be written by theorists who are arguing a particular viewpoint or position with regard to an issue within the media. It is this which forms the debates surrounding the study of the media, in which you, as a media student, are now becoming involved.
- **Listing your research:** It is good practice, and excellent evidence of your wider reading, to list all references to secondary research, whether mentioned within the essay or not, at the end of your work. This is usually written in this way:
 - Notes**
 - 1. Len Masterman, *Teaching About Television*, London, Macmillan, 1980.
 - 2. Manuel Alvarado and Bob Ferguson, "The Curriculum, Media Studies and Discursivity", *Screen*, vol.24, No.3, May-June 1983.
 Other media texts referred to in detail should be listed, with relevant information such as the director, date of release or transmission, production company and, where possible, scene or episode number. Where you have compiled primary research, it is useful to offer a brief summary of this also at the end of your work.

Using Research

- **Organising your research:** Before rushing headlong into the local library, the first stage of research is to plan two things. When are you able to do your research and how are you going to organise the information gathered? You may, for example, wish to make notes under the headings listed above.
- **Applying your research:** Always return to the specific questions being asked of the text. The most obvious pitfall is to gather up all of the collected information and throw it at the page, hoping to score points for quantity. The art of good research is how you use it as part of or evidence for an analysis of the text which you are exploring. The knowledge you have acquired should give you the confidence to explore the text, offer your own arguments and, where appropriate, to quote references to support this.

INTRODUCTION by Phil Wickham

Television sitcom is a genre that has sparked a great deal of critical controversy over the years, yet as well as being enormously successful in terms of ratings it has also spawned some important programmes that have proved creative highpoints for television both in Britain and America. In addition sitcom, more than any other genre apart from soap operas, aspires to offer a look at the real world, albeit from a comic perspective. For all these reasons sitcom is an important area of the media that is well worth studying. And you get to laugh too.

Sitcom simply means comedy arising from a situation. Because of the need for a lot of time and space to establish characters and setting and to develop a relationship with the audience, sitcom is a form exclusive to broadcasting; originating in the radio of the 1940s and coming to fruition on television in the 1950s with hits like *I Love Lucy* in the US and *Hancock's Half Hour* in Britain.

These two landmark shows set the American and British varieties of sitcom on different courses and distinctive styles developed that still predominate today. American sitcoms are typically produced by a team of writers and large numbers of episodes are produced for each hit series to aid syndication – that is the sale of shows to affiliate TV stations so that reruns appear for years after production has ceased. Artistically the team system prioritises the power of the 'gag' and allows each line to be refined for maximum effect. The best US shows are notable for a high density of laughs and very tight plotting.

In Britain shows are typically produced by one (for instance, David Renwick, John Sullivan, Jennifer Saunders), or often two individuals (Ray Galton and Alan Simpson, Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais, Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant). Practically this means that many less episodes can be produced. Artistically British series are very much about the personal vision of the writer, which inevitably produces as many misses as hits. However at its best this authorship has given the humour a resonance and depth, based around our identification with particular sitcom characters. Critics, particularly in newspapers, often compare British and American sitcoms (in recent years usually to the detriment of British programmes) but it is important to note that they are different forms that have different aims and strengths. They have developed to suit their respective cultures.

Like all genres there are certain conventions that define a sitcom. Part of the reason for the criticism that sitcom has received is that these conventions have been considered too rigid, to the point where they are seen as stifling creativity and creating a production line of identikit, tame shows. The traditional sitcom is invariably 30 minutes long and shot in a heavily lit studio in front of a few recurring sets. The show performed in a theatrical style in front of a studio audience whose laughter is captured on the soundtrack. The narratives are designed so that the situation is largely unchanging and the conclusion of each episode represents a return to the status quo. It can be argued however that genre conventions and codes can encourage creative expression (look at westerns or Film Noir) and that rules present a challenge to bring out the unexpected and exciting from the familiar.

American series still follow this format pretty closely and successes like *Seinfeld* and *Friends* show it can still work well.

In the UK however there has been a revolution in the approach to sitcoms in the last few years. The format has been opened out with the laugh track removed, more shooting on location and use of a stronger narrative so that characters have more room to develop. Also programme makers have built on a darkness that has always been at the heart of British comedy to create comedy from the most unlikely material. Studio laughter has become much rarer since the success in the late 1990s of *The Royle Family* and audiences have now become used to its absence, learning to watch sitcoms in a different way. *The Office* offers many pleasures, not least of which was the narrative about Tim and Dawn's would be romance, which was as gripping as any drama. *The League of Gentlemen* and *Nighty Night* wrung comedy out from the horrific and the tragic. Such innovation has made the last ten years an exciting time in British sitcom – the only problem is that this more challenging approach and the advent of multichannel with its economic pressures has pushed sitcom to the margins of television experience, onto minority channels like BBC2, BBC3 and Channel 4. Inevitably sitcom no longer has the huge ratings the genre commanded in the 1970s and 1980s. One of the triumphs of sitcom has been its status as a mass experience and it would be a shame if this power is lost.

The best sitcoms take us on a journey where their characters and situations that mirrors the experience of life itself. We can live vicariously through Victor Meldrew, or Barbara Royle, or Basil Fawlty and see our own struggles played out to comic effect. They console us about the way we are. The nature of sitcom with its long runs and emphasis on the comic rather than dramatic means it matches the rhythms of everyday existence. It is no coincidence that most comedies have been based around the family or around the work place, as these are common experiences for almost all. Because of this closeness to reality we can see the evolution of social change in the programmes and it is here that critics have found the form wanting, arguing that it is inherently conservative – however a look at some shows as different as *Absolutely Fabulous* and *The Cosby Show* illustrate that it is by no means as simple as that.

Sitcoms are then well worthy of study, telling us much about television and its audience, contemporary society and social change, not to mention the meaning of life itself, no less. This source guide details important writing about the form in general, and no less than 30 important titles in particular. You can find all this material in the bfi National Library and it should stimulate ideas and sharpen your arguments. Get researching!

GENERAL REFERENCES

BOOKS

BANKS, Morwenna and SWIFT, Amanda
The Joke's On Us: Women in Comedy from Music Hall to the Present Day
London: Pandora, 1987. 294p. illus. bibliog. index.

Adopting an historical approach - from 1880 onwards - the authors examine the role of the comedienne in a number of different genres, from cabaret and radio through to television and film. There is an extremely useful section, on the depiction of women within British situation comedies, entitled - Television (pp.226-60).

BAZALGETTE, Cary, COOK, Jim and MEDHURST, Andy
Teaching TV Sitcom; edited by Jim Cook and Nicky North. London: BFI Education, 1985. 98p. bibliog. Contains slide set.

Although this pack is aimed at teachers, it is extremely useful for students -particularly Part I: Foreground Reading - which presents both a brief analysis of the subject 'comedy' and offers, "a history of sitcom". Also includes notes on specifically chosen episodes, which have been selected from a number of situation comedies, including the episode 'Demolition' from the first series of THE YOUNG ONES.

BEE, Jim
The discourses of British Domestic Sitcom. Paper presented to the 1986 International Television Studies Conference.
London: 1986. 42p, tables.

Academic study of some research into sitcoms which suggests that there are only a small range of character-types used in most of them, and they are significantly gender and class differentiated, playing against an expectation of middle-class, patriarchal models. Predominantly wayward, rigid or inept males tend to make up a significant number of these types. Might provide a useful way of testing more recent sitcoms to see how much - if at all- these theories still work.

BERMAN Garry
Best of the Britcoms: from Fawlty Towers to Absolutely Fabulous
Dallas: Taylor, 1999. Page 220

Brief history gives way to sections covering the 70s, 80s and the 90s, with about 3 or so pages per sitcom, all from an American perspective, albeit one who is an anglophile and TV buff. There is also a brief section on US versions of British sitcoms which failed to "translate".

BRADBURY, David and McGRATH, Joe
Now That's Funny! Conversations with Comedy Writers
London: Methuen, 1998, 191p.,

A set of interviews with British writers, some of whom have written for both film and television. Of especial interest here are Johnny Speight, John Sullivan, Richard Curtis and Caroline Aherne, but most of the key names are also here even if their work hasn't been included in our selection.

COOK, Jim (ed.)
Television Sitcom
London: BFI, 1982. 100p. bibliog. teleog. (BFI Dossier 17).

Selection of essays dealing with various aspects of situation comedy, which are divided into four main categories. These include a more general analysis of the chief characteristics of this genre: narrative, depiction of stereotypes and nostalgia; the function of language; an examination of the use of realism within social and political comedies and the treatment of sexuality and gender.

CORNELL, Paul, DAY, Martin and TOPPING, Keith
The Guinness book of classic British television.
Enfield: Guinness Publishing, 1993. 444p. [16]Plates. index.

This work is a selective look at British television programming since the 1950's and could be helpful and interesting background reading. It includes two lengthy sections on selected sitcoms from the 1950's onwards. Each entry provides the production history of a classic sitcom, cast and credit details and broadcast information. The entries also offer some critical analysis of the style, formula and success of a particular sitcom.

CREEBER, Glen, editor.
The television Genre Book.
London: BFI, 2001. 163p., illus., bibliog..

In the chapter on Comedy, there are three sections on situation comedy (pp 65-72) and included in this is a case study on unruly women (ABSOLUTELY FABULOUS is one title covered) and a section on "gay" and "queer" sitcom (including WILL & GRACE). The whole section gives a useful if rather condensed over-view and history of the genre.

CROWTHER
Bring Me Laughter : Four Decades of TV Comedy by Bruce Crowther and Mike Pinfold (Columbus Books London 1987)

An excellent, if now rather out of date, accessible guide to TV comedy in Britain and the USA. The book is useful particularly because it mixes chapters offering an historical overview with others that look at the subject thematically. There are excellent and incisive chapters on the way TV comedy has tackled subjects like the family, class, gender and race.

GRAY, Frances
Women and Laughter
London: The Macmillan Press, 1994. 202p. bibliog. index. (Women in Society).

Written from a feminist perspective, Gray begins by analysing the concept of Laughter, in order to make a distinction between male and female humour, and then proceeds to explore in some depth specific mediums such as television, theatre, and cabaret. Within the section on television there is a particular focus on the genre of situation comedy, which is divided into two parts: Born in the USA: a Story of Money and Angels (pp.41-79) and British Sitcom: a Rather Sad Story (pp.80-111).

JACOBSON, Howard
Seriously Funny: From the ridiculous to the sublime
London: Viking, 1997. 258p., illus., bibliog.

Based on his Channel 4 series this raucous, informative and entertaining book by top British Novemberelist Jacobson explores the history and principles of comedy. Its tales of comic codes and practices as far back as the ancients lead help to explain our responses to TV comedy

KOSELUK, Gregory
Great Brit-coms: British Television Situation Comedy.
Jefferson, North Carolina & London: McFarland, 2000. 563pp., index, illus.

Detailed look at 13 titles, including STEPTOE, DAD'S ARMY, FAWLTY TOWERS, YES, MINISTER, BLACKADDER and ONE FOOT IN THE GRAVE, from an American perspective. Analysis and background are given.

LEWISOHN, Mark
Radio Times Guide to TV Comedy.
New edition, London: BBC, 2003. 961pp., index, illus.

Comprehensive reference book to TV comedy series screened in the UK, including cable and satellite. Brief synopsis and analysis given along with main cast. There are brief articles on key people. All your favourite sitcoms will be here.

MAST, Gerald
The Comic Mind. Comedy and the Movies
2nd ed., Univ. of Chicago Press 1979. 369p., illus.

Although concentrated on film comedy this seminal work is useful for the student of TV comic forms, particularly for its chapters on comic thought and comic structures. It is important to get a sense of the way comic strategies work upon an audience.

MINTZ, Lawrence E.
Situation comedy (In TV genres: a handbook and reference guide, edited by Brian G. Rose).
Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985. pp. 107-129.

The chapter is an introductory discussion to mainly American television situation comedy although the impact of several British sitcoms upon American television are discussed. The continuing appeal, values and forms are examined in three sections entitled: Overview, Historical Development and Themes and Issues.

MORREALE, January, editor.
Critiquing the sitcom. A Reader.
New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003. 357p., illus.

Chronological arrangement focusing entirely on US sitcoms, but with significant chapters on many of the key shows of the genre. Bill Cosby and the COSBY SHOW get featured quite strongly as does that final episode of SEINFELD.

MINTZ, Lawrence E.
Situation comedy (In TV genres: a handbook and reference guide, edited by Brian G. Rose).
Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985. pp. 107-129.

The chapter is an introductory discussion to mainly American television situation comedy although the impact of several British sitcoms upon American television are discussed. The continuing appeal, values and forms are examined in three sections entitled: Overview, Historical Development and Themes and Issues.

NEALE, Steve and KRUTNIK, Frank
Popular film and comedy; essays on style, theme, performer and writer.
London: Routledge, 1990. 291p. index

An unlikely topic for a book by Neale and Krutnik, these two have produced a highly detailed and theoretical study of comedy on the large and small screen. Although biased towards the authors' tastes, there is a lengthy chapter on female portrayals and performances which does look into television situation comedy.

NEWCOMB, Horace, ed.
Encyclopedia of Television.
2nd ed. New York: Fitzroy Dearborn 2004. 4 vols., illus.

This mammoth four volume work sponsored by the Museum of Broadcasting is a fantastic reference tool for the TV studies student and includes copious essays on TV sitcoms from Britain and America, often with further references listed.

PUTTERMAN, Barry
On television and comedy: essays on style, theme, performer and writer.
Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1995. i-x. 21 Op. Illus. index.

This collection of essays explores television comedy in both its traditional and-modern forms. The various essays discuss how the traditional values of comedy evolved and how these have altered over the last two Decades.

Although this evaluation concentrates largely upon American comedians and programmes, the impact of British alternative comedians from the "Comic Strip" stable on American comedy is analysed. It also includes a detailed chapter on the comic style of French and Saunders. (French and Saunders: anatomy of a comedy team, pp. 180-188).

SNOAD, Harold
Directing situation comedy
Borehamwood: BBC Television Training, 1988. 56p., illus.

Included because it may be useful to consider how TV sitcoms are put together when you are trying to work out what makes them funny.

TAYLOR, Rod
The Guinness Book of Sitcoms
Enfield, Middx., 1994. 288p. illus. index.

A guide to British and American situation comedies arranged alphabetically. Entries include details of first broadcast dates, brief synopses of each series, and

basic credit information.

THOMPSON, Ben

Sunshine on Putty. The Golden Age of British Comedy from Vic Reeves to the Office

[Rev edition] :Harper Perennial, 2004. 468p., col. illus.

Though its main thesis deals with everything after 1990, up until LITTLE BRITAIN in this revised version, the book does reflect on earlier people and programmes, and the emphasis is as much about the comedians and writers themselves as it is on the TV shows. Whether you agree that we are in (or perhaps just reaching the end of) another golden age of British comedy is irrelevant: there is much here to get to grips with, though not all of it is sitcom.

WAGG, Stephen, ed.

Because I tell a Joke or two: Comedy, Politics and Social Difference

London: Routledge, 1997. 322p.

A useful, if rather over earnest, set of essays on comedy that has a number of chapters on, or touching on, TV sitcom. Wagg himself contributes an essay on class, there is an overview of the contexts of American sitcoms and a trio of pieces about women and comedy.

WILMUT, Roger and ROSENGARD, Peter

Didn't You Kill My Mother-in-Law?: The Story of Alternative Comedy in Britain from The Comedy Store to Saturday Live

London: Methuen, 1989. 285p. illus. appendix, index.

This book offers a detailed and well-illustrated history of British alternative comedy including THE COMIC STRIP PRESENTS... and the situation comedy – GIRLS ON TOP.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

LISTENER

June 1987, p.35

Gendered Jokes by Andrea Solomons

Discussion of female comic writers and the idea of female humour while focusing on publication The Jokes On Us, (Pandora) by Morwenna Banks and Amanda Swift.

TELEVISION TODAY

7 April 1988, p.23

Writing With Serious Intent: Comedy is No Longer a Laughing Matter

by Tony Bagley

Article discusses the changing role of humour, resulting in a merging of 'serious art' and 'entertainment'. Comedy is becoming more aligned with drama, it is argued, and is capable of tackling difficult and provocative subjects.

M MAGAZINE

EITF (Edinburgh International Television Festival) 1991, pp.42-43

So Girls, What is There to Laugh At? by Morwenna Banks

Looks at the role of women in British TV comedy

and includes comments and viewpoints from women involved in comedy.

IMPACT

May 1992, pp. 10-12

Sex, Laughs and Stereotypes by Susan Jeffreys

Article considers the lapse back into traditional clichés in plot and stereotypes of women in recent independent productions, focussing on SO HAUNT ME and MAY TO DECEMBER, and compares these with current comedies that do have strong women characters.

NATIONAL FILM THEATRE PROGRAMMES

March 1993, pp.24-25

Season at the NFT of a selection of television comedies of Frankie Howerd, Sid James, Benny Hill, Marty Feldman and Peter Sellers.

SIGHT AND SOUND

September 1993, p.59

Crumpets and Flares by Ben Thompson

Discussion on the popularity of 70's sitcoms and the availability of their film adaptations on video. Examines ARE YOU BEING SERVED? and THE LIKELY LADS.

JOURNAL OF BROADCASTING AND ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Winter 1994, pp.91-101

Gender Stereotypes in MTV Commercials: The Beat Goes On

by Nancy SignorieHi, Douglas McLeod and Elaine Healy

Examines gender portrayals and stereotyping in commercials on MTV. Reveals that the representation of females is stereotypical and often the object of another's gaze. Contains tables of statistics.

TV WORLD

September 1996, pp16-17

COMIC TIMING, by January Millichip

A discussion about attempts to translate UK sitcoms for a US audience, which explains a bit about how the deals are set up and what has or hasn't worked.

TELEVISION QUARTERLY

Vol. 29. No 2. 1997 pp. 36-44

Sitcom Ruminations...by Mary Ann Watson

Loosely a report back on the "Situating the Comedy" conference held at Bowling Green State University, Ohio, but with odd comments and observations about a number of US classic sitcoms.

CLASSIC TELEVISION

No 3, February/Mar 1998, pp30-32, illus.

The Boys to Entertain You, by Rob Cope

An interview with Jimmy Perry and David Croft, which

covers all their main series' work and also that of Jimmy Perry working with others. Useful both as a reminder of their work and gives some clues as to what worked and why, and what didn't.

TV WORLD

October 1998 pp. 63-64

So What's Funny? by Hilary Curtis

Relatively brief article that looks at the absence of hot comedy shows at the time in both the UK and the US, suggesting a shift away from sitcoms.

JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATIONS

Spring, 1999, pp.55-70

Feminine Desire in the Age of Satellite Television, by Michael Curtin

In a section called "An Era of Indeterminacy" (pp62-64), Curtin outlines in some detail how the show "rips open a Pandora's Box of kinky feminine desire" and shows how much the two main characters are quite monstrous in their consumption and their behaviour.

JOURNAL OF BROADCASTING & ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Vol. 45, No.1, Winter 2001

From wise to foolish: the portrayal of the sitcom father, 1950s –1990s, by Erica Scharrer

Focusing on US programmes, this paper suggests that recent television fathers and working class fathers are more likely to be shown in a foolish light, than those of the past or of higher socio-economic classes. One of the sitcom fathers mentioned is from the COSBY SHOW.

IN THE PICTURE

No. 46. April 2003 pp. 17-18

Sitcoms and Absurdism, by Andrew Hirschorn

The author offers a syntagm (look it up) to help with the analysis of TV sitcoms and includes some of the titles we have chosen as examples.

PRESS ARTICLES

NEW STATESMAN

5 June 1992 pp. 31-2

Get rid of the whippet by Susan Jeffreys

What makes British sitcoms funny? General roundup of the genre, with particular attention to "political correctness".

SUNDAY TIMES

26 July 1992 p.17

First Opinion by January Etherington

A writer herself, Etherington gives some insight into the writing of sitcoms.

INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY

20 September 1992 pp.6-7

It's a funny business by William Leith

A fairly detailed look at how a sitcom is made, with lots of references to shows that have succeeded and those that have failed, which reminds us that the pre-acceptance process is quite a cumbersome one.

EVENING STANDARD

15 October 1992 pp.26-27

Making a comedy out of a crisis, by Annalena McAfee

A look at the use of unexpected situations as a basis for sitcoms, with particular reference to Laurence Marks and Maurice Gran and their programmes.

SUNDAY TIMES

10 January 1993 p.8

Capital work for some by John Dugdale

Regional analysis of sitcoms at the time suggests that virtually all of them are tending to be set in London – why is this?

EVENING STANDARD

13 January 1993 p55

Laughing all the way to the fish shop, by Geoffrey Phillips.

Asks the question why sitcom producers can't manage without a canned Laughter track.

DAILY TELEGRAPH TV & RADIO SECTION

20 February 1993 p.18

What makes a sitcom click? By Roma Felstein

At the time, ITV were launching Comedy Playhouse, so they asked a number of people with relevant experience what they thought were the secrets of successful sitcoms. Those giving their views are John Sullivan, Lenny Henry, Lynda Bellingham, Richard Briers, Ruby Wax, Prunella Scales and Louise Rix.

DAILY TELEGRAPH

20 Mar 1993 pp18-19

Sitcoms out of touch, by Lee Rodwell

This article focuses on ITV's slate of Sitcoms for 1993, and is based on the pilots viewed by a family audience. The tone is critical; how many of these do you remember? SAILORTOWN; STUCK ON YOU; THE 10%ERS; WILD OATS; BRIGHTON BELLES.

TODAY

15 July 1993 p 7

Why did the Laughter have to die? By Dominic Midgley

Rather general article in which a couple of writers (Johnny Speight, Ray Galton) are quoted on their views as to what has gone wrong with sitcoms in Britain.

DAILY MAIL

17 July 1993 p 33

Join in with the fun with the new kids on the box by Lester Middlehurst

Looks at sitcoms that have tried – and often failed - to portray a multicultural setting, the context being the launch of WHAT YOU LOOKIN' AT.

INDEPENDENT REVIEW

7 December 2000, p7

'Ally McBeal makes me spew' ..., by Brian Viner
The view is that of Warren Mitchell who is interviewed in the run up to his portrayal of the Ghost of Christmas Past for ITV, and he takes his chance to offer views on television and on several of the sitcoms included in this guide.

GUARDIAN

5 January 2004 pp. 24-5

BBC has last laugh in US by David Teather

About BBC America success in launching British sitcoms in the US.

GUARDIAN

24 May 2004 (media section) pp. 8-9

'No Laughing Matter' by Jon Thoday

About 'The Sketch Show' and the problems of comedy commissioning

GUARDIAN

6 October 2003 pp.2/17

Situation Vacant by Rupert Smith

Asks why sitcoms don't seem to the author to be indicative of our time, unlike previous generations.

UK SITCOMS

A selective listing by title.

ABSOLUTELY FABULOUS

BOOKS

GERAGHTY, Christine & **LUSTED**, David, eds

The Television Studies Book.

London: Arnold, 1998. 337p., bibliogs.

In chapter 18, called "Absolutely Fabulous: Absolutely Feminist?", by Pat Kirkham and Beverley Skeggs (pp 287-298), the authors link AbFab into the mainly American influenced tradition of burlesque and disruptive television, whilst arguing that what it sends up in its Thatcherite portrayal of "self-first" consumption, might also be received as desirable to that part of the audience who may not see it as a send-up.

SAUNDERS, Jennifer

Absolutely Fabulous

London: BBC Books, 1993. 165p. [16]piates.

Collection of scripts - with cast lists - from the first series, including 'ISO TANK', 'BIRTHDAY*' and 'MAGAZINE'. Also contains some scenes and dialogue which were not eventually transmitted.

SAUNDERS, Jennifer

Absolutely Fabulous 2

London: BBC Books, 1994. 151p. [16]plates.

This collection of scripts covers all the episodes from the second series. Again includes cast lists for each episode.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL TELEVISION SOCIETY

September 1997, pp.14-15

It's just comedy,sweetie, by Jon Plowman

The head of entertainment at the BBC talks about the beginnings of AbFab and argues for its key role in allowing women to misbehave and thereby change the way women are perceived in comedy show terms

RADIO TIMES

11-17 October 2003, pp.18-20

Still fabulous, sweetie, by Jeff Dawson

As the fifth series rolled into production Jennifer Saunders talks about the Decemberisation to continue, in the context of the popularity of the show and despite some critics suggesting the idea had run out of steam.

SCRIPTWRITER

November, 2001 pp 61-2

Absolutely Fabulous, by Ian Jones

If AbFab didn't do it for you, this article may tell you why. It presents a critique of the show (based on the fourth series) suggesting that the whole thing is based on derivative ideas, poorly executed delivery and too-many

limb contorting pratfalls.

PRESS ARTICLES

The following reviews and articles are held on microfiche at the bfi National Library under the title ABSOLUTELY FABULOUS.

DAILY TELEGRAPH

13 November 1992 p.20

INDEPENDENT

19 November 1992 p.23

DAILY TELEGRAPH

27 November 1992 p. 19

TODAY

18 December 1992 p.23

MAIL ON SUNDAY

9 January 1993 p.21

DAILY MAIL

19 October 1993 p.3

THE TIMES

22 January 1994 p.5

INDEPENDENT

26 January 1994

DAILY MAIL

28 January 1994 p. 43

INDEPENDENT

28 January 1994

DAILY TELEGRAPH

28 January 1994 p. 15

NEW STATESMAN AND SOCIETY

28 January 1994 p. 35

THE TIMES

28 January 1994

Additionally, there are more up to date reviews and some press release information on later fiche. These include:

ASIAN AGE

3 December 2001, p16

Sarah Lyall wonders whether more episodes can be made, in the light of apparent comedy fatigue.

INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY.

ARTS ETC. p.6

Charlie Courtauld reviews the Christmas 2001 special

SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

26 August 2001, p.57

Giles Smith reviews the fourth series first episode.

ALL ABOUT ME

Note: At the time of compiling this listing, there was no book material available about this sitcom. There is a synopsis and cast listing on the BBC website.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

RADIO TIMES

2-8 March 2002, p.124

All About Me, by Alison Graham

A very brief column, which points out that the series has shied away from using the disabled character as the

focus, and settled for a kind of "MY FAMILY" type "aren't my family wonderful" approach without the tight writing that distinguished that series.

PRESS ARTICLES

GUARDIAN

4 March 2002 p.13

The Ideal Home Show, by Mark Lawson

Suggests that this is probably the oddest mainstream comedy BBC has ever screened (overtaken now by NIGHTY NIGHT, or possibly others we suspect), and perhaps flawed in its apparently contradictory central character Colin who seems to be a racist but happily accepts a step-son who is Asian and disabled. Is this ground-breaking? The article will point you at the key issues.

GUARDIAN

9 March 2002 p.21

Meera Syal's Comedy of Errors, by Gareth McLean

Critical review, which suggests that Jasper Carrott (Colin, the father of the family) weakens the programme with a poor performance. There are precedents enough in sitcom land for miseries as main characters but he doesn't live up to them.

INDEPENDENT

11 March 2002 p.12

Review, by Robert Hanks

Well he does try to like it but Hanks suggests that it doesn't work in part because the scripts are weak and the plot requires a high level of "back-story" to bring the audience up to speed.

Maybe sitcoms don't work if the situation is implausible and the comedy weak? Discuss.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

NB The bfi National Library Special Collections section holds scripts for this series as well as a guide to the production of this sitcom.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

RADIO TIMES

No 3827 7 June 1997 pp.20-22, illus.

Will the Birds stay together? by Alison Graham

As the seventh series tries to tackle the "fact" that the Birds' husbands have been released from prison, this article talks about the changes and developments to character and plot this may entail, but also fills in a bit of history for those less familiar with the series.

EMMY

Vol.14 No. 2. April 1992 pp.7-8, illus.

Below the Line: Brit's Wit, by Bridget Byrne

This is mainly an article about producer Allan McKeown and the work done to make BIRDS "fit" for a US audience, where it was remade as STAND BY YOUR MAN. As such it provides some indication about what is and what is not deemed suitable for a US audience.

TV TIMES

31 May 1997, pp.12-13, illus.

Would you want Dorien as a neighbour? by Nikki Murfitt

In talking about the character of Dorien, Lesley JoSeptemberberh provides some insight into the dynamics of the series.

PRESS ARTICLES

STAGE

29 May 1997, p26, illus.

Time for those birds to soar again, by Januarye Garner

Producer Claire Hinson discusses the charm and durability of the series.

MAIL ON SUNDAY

26 December 1993 p.15

Feather Report, by Hunter Davies

Instead of the regular series, Davies reviewed the Christmas special, admitting that he had not previously seen a complete show. His reason may say something about attitudes to sitcom, and why sitcoms get Christmas "specials" is worth thinking about. Is it "traditional", and if so, what tradition is being followed?

NEW STATESMAN & SOCIETY

7 Septemberteber 1990, p.35, illus.

Birds a-flutter, by Ben Thompson

Though partly a review of BIRDS as it returned for a second series, the opening passage of this piece gives a helpful run through some of the stock characters particular to most sitcoms.

INDEPENDENT

17 October 1989, p16

Scenes of Crass Struggle, by Fiona Maddocks

A challenging review from the first series – in fact from episode 1, which is really the scene setter. Shows how the idea was developed, but also that it was felt unlikely to succeed.

BLACKADDER

BOOKS

CURTIS, Richard

Blackadder. The Whole Damn Dynasty

London: Michael JoSeptemberberh, 1998. 455p., illus.

The scripts plus some incidental "background" material.

ROBERTS, Graham & TAYLOR, Philip M, editors.

The Historian, Television and Television History

Luton: University of Luton Press, 2001. 181p.

Chapter 11: "Blackadder Goes Forth and the two western fronts debate", by Stephen Badsey looks at the series both as history and as television with the emphasis on the final series.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

TELEVISION WEEKLY

No 22, 17 June 1983 p10

Rowan's history IAugusth-in [anon]

Brief item about the origins of the idea, with comments from Atkinson, Curtis and John Lloyd who was brought in to re-shape the pilot and series 1.

LISTENER

28 July 1983, pp.25-26

Mucking up the video, by Ned Sherrin

The last section of this article reviews the last episode of the first season – it is mainly notable for the assumption that killing off the main character means there will be no revival (though Ned Sherrin does plead for the return of the characters), but as other genres have shown this is no obstacle.

CULT TV

Vol. 2 No. 3 March 1998, pp.46-50, illus.

Boys from the Black Stuff, by Stephen O'Brien

This is a useful article which touches upon the near failure of the show, and how it was changed in order to be re-commissioned. Some attention to the way the Blackadder character changed and why, and what this says about the way comedy works may help here. There is also a useful history of the show and its guest stars (worth comparing with US sitcoms?) and a feature on Richard Curtis.

TV ZONE

No. 160, March 2003, pp.48-54, illus.

History, here I come!, by Andrew Pixley

Lengthy article on the origins of the series, including information about regular cast, and the pilot episode, plus an episode guide. Strong on detail about the production side of the show, and interesting for ideas that were not subsequently developed as well as those that were. Close attention will unearth some nuggets that reveal something about sitcoms in general, and, of course, this

one specifically.

TV ZONE

No.160, March 2003, pp 55-56, illus.

Something ...cunning, by Paul Spragg.

An interview with Tony Robinson, looking mainly at the role played by his character, Baldrick.

COUPLING

At the time of compiling this list there was no book material available about this sitcom.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

RADIO TIMES

20 – 26 May 2000, p45

Sex? It's no Laughing matter, by Alison Graham

Brief piece (and interesting how frequently RT pieces knock their own shows) saying that the show is smutty, unfunny, and isn't SEINFELD – so that may suggest something to make comparisons with.

SCRIPTWRITER

May 2002, pp.60-62

TV Reviews. Flirty-somethings, by Jack Kibble-White

An interesting overview of the various shows based on groups of friends that have aired between 1996 and 2002. COUPLING is one of those featured.

BROADCASTING & CABLE

12 May 2003, p.41

NBC Hopes Sexy New Coupling will be TVs next Break-Out Hit, by Paige Albinak

Looks at the American take on COUPLING, which was seen as a possible strong replacement in the slots previously taken by FRIENDS and by FRASIER. Suggests that although the UK show is seen as sexy, it would be deemed less graphic than either WILL & GRACE or SEX AND THE CITY.

ARIEL

30 September 2003, p.6

Coupling hopes for America's approval, by Claire Barrett

BBC House Journal's piece written when the show was about to be screened in the US (some stations pulled out rather than offend audiences) and the concept was also being marketed to the US as an idea for a US version to be made.

PRESS ARTICLES

GUARDIAN

8 May 2000, p.7

Two of a Kind, by M[ark] L[awson]

Review of first series, with some background information, including some information on the writer, Steven Moffat, and his earlier work.

DAILY TELEGRAPH

15 May 2000, review.

Miles ahead of the Rest, by James Walton

Good general review focusing on the cast more than the overall concept, and suggesting quality but non-originality, with a debt to FRIENDS.

GUARDIAN

Section 2, 3 September 2001, p17

With the new run of Coupling, creator Steven Moffat deftly avoids TVs dreaded second-series syndrome, by Mark Lawson

Whilst suggesting that there is a certain artificiality about the series (is this not true of the genre anyway?) Lawson focuses on "The Man with Two Legs" episode whilst generally praising the author and looking at how the action is played out by the cast.

GUARDIAN

Section 2, 23 September 2002, p17

Critics who maintain that American comedy has killed off all our home-grown efforts are in for a shock this week when three successful British sitcoms return to BBC2, by Mark Lawson.

The title of the review gives some clues, but there is a useful analysis (including some about the use of the split-screen technique) of COUPLING, plus consideration of THE OFFICE and of THE LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN.

DAD'S ARMY

BOOKS

DUNN, Clive

Permission to Speak

London: Century Books, 1986, 250p., illus.

Chapter 16 deals with Dad's Army, in this autobiography which, by its title alone probably shows the impact the series and its catchphrases have had.

Le MESURIER, John

A Jobbing Actor.

London: Elm Tree Books, 1984, 159p., illus.

Chapter 7 of this autobiography covers John Le Mesurier's Decision to take the part of Sergeant Wilson, and gives some interesting background to the show.

LORD, Graham

Arthur Lowe

London: Orion Press, 2002, 258p., illus.

Lengthy biography, well-indexed with major sections on the DAD'S ARMY programme.

LOWE, Stephen

Arthur Lowe – a life, by his son...

London: Nick Hern Books, 1996., illus.

With a useful index, to check the DAD'S ARMY references. The main section covers pages 102-108, and includes some brief press extracts to highlight particular points.

McCANN, Graham

Dad's Army. The story of a classic television show.

London: Fourth Estate, 2001., 292p., illus., bibliog..

The title says it all, really. How does a show become "classic"? This book tells you and it does cover both the situation and the comedy in Separate sections. There are also sections on the characters and the company as well as a full episode guide.

MORGAN-RUSSELL, Simon

Jimmy Perry and David Croft.

Manchester University Press, 2004. 179p., illus.

One of "The Television Series" publications, covering these two writers and creators.

There is a whole chapter devoted to the series, but the index includes other references as well scattered throughout the book.

PERTWEE, Bill

Dad's Army. The making of a television legend.

London, Newton Abbott: David & Charles, 1989. 144p., illus., (some col.).

An insider's view of the successful show, with anecdotes, and background including quite a lot about the main and other, regular, cast members' careers.

WEBBER, Richard, ed.

Dad's Army: The Home Front by Jimmy Perry and David Croft

London: Orion, 2002. 432p., illus.

A full set of scripts covering series 5-9, complemented by a large number of reminiscences from the participants about each episode and some useful general articles on the shooting and design of the show.

WEBBER, Richard

Dad's Army: a Celebration

London: Virgin 1999. 192p., illus.

Essentially a series guide but with a foreword by Michael Palin.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

RADIO TIMES

27 May 2000, pp26-27, illus.

Still Ribbing for Victory, by Brian Viner

In an interview with Victoria Wood, who is a loyal fan of DAD'S ARMY, she identifies her favourite scenes from the series. The article also looks briefly at how the work was crafted.

CULT TV

Vol. 2. No. 3 March 1998, pp.34 – 37, illus. (some col.).

A to Z Dad's Army, by Nikki Bayley

Useful reminder of some of the characters, catchphrases and quirks of plot from this excellent standard sitcom.

CLASSIC TELEVISION

No1, September 1997, pp10-12, illus.

None but the Brave, by Deano Marriott

By focusing on the origins and strength of the cast and the characters they play, the author investigates whether DAD'S ARMY is an insight into British character, or simply a very funny comedy.

DESMOND'S

NB There are no monographs devoted to Desmond's at the time of compiling this listing.

BOOKS

PINES, Jim

Black and White in Colour. Black people in British television since 1936.

London: BFI, 1992, illus.

By using the index of this volume it is possible to identify several relevant sections about DESMOND'S. Additionally, there are interviews with Trix Worrell, Norman Beaton and Carmen Munroe which all add some additional information.

PRESS ARTICLES

THE TIMES

27 September 1994, p47

[Review], by Matthew Bond

Short but pithy review which suggests that DESMOND'S is in fact an old-style sitcom of the previous era, rather than cutting edge political satire.

VOICE

4 October 1994, p 2

[Review], by [anon.]

As the sixth and final series airs, the reviewer indicates that this time there is more "edge", despite the apparent use of both a canned Laughter track and a live audience.

VOICE

13 December 1994, p2

Desmond's RIP, by Alister Harry

A review of the Christmas special (a staple of Sitcom?) is used to offer a general overview of the series and its impact.

FATHER TED

BOOKS

LINEHAN, Graham , MATHEWS, Arthur,
Father Ted: the complete scripts
London : Boxtree, 2000, p.368, illus

Scripts of the three series of FATHER TED, as well as some early scripts that were never screened. The authors give this volume an added bonus by providing an informative commentary on each episode.

MATHEWS, Arthur, LINEHAN, Graham
Father Ted: the Craggy Island parish magazines

London : Boxtree, 1998, p.88, illus

While not giving any insights into the series, this stocking filler annual is aimed at fans of the shows. The book is a collection of Father Ted's favourite editions of his parish magazine. It includes a history of Craggy Island, Father Dougal's games page, insights, adverts and short stories.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

SCRIPTWRITER

No.4. May 2002. p.44-45.illus.interview

Slightly lightweight interview with FATHER TED co-writer Graham Linehan. However, he does reveal some of his influences both from film and television, and in particular pays homage to the John Cleese/Connie Booth writing partnership. Ultimately Linehan acknowledges that for all its strengths and weaknesses that he is unlikely ever to write a better show than Father Ted.

CULT TV

Vol.2 No.4. April 1998. p.9.illus.article

Brief item of interest since it deals with the sudden death of actor Dermot Morgan and how it affected all those around him.

FILM IRELAND

No.62. December 97/January'98. pp.12-15.illus.article

Diary style account of a day's shooting on location with Father Ted. No real insights but captures a moment in time and reveals a tiny snippet on how the crew worked on the show.

PRESS ARTICLES

DAILY TELEGRAPH

2 March 1996

Father Ted brings blessed relief by Steve Clarke

Article that coincides with the start of the second series of FATHER TED. It examines the complexities of a series that on the one hand looks anarchic and surreal and on the other possesses a cosy traditional sit-com feel. The article also skims over the issues of the impact of Father Ted on the Catholic church.

THE GUARDIAN

21 March 1996

Grins of the fathers by Mark Lawson

Mark Lawson ponders on the successes of Ballykissangel and FATHER TED and in so doing uncovers a movement in taking Irish stereotypes and making them acceptable to TV audiences. The article analyses the appeal of both programmes. He also attempts to discover a new Ireland emerging from out of the Troubles.

THE SCOTSMAN

28 February 1998

The divine comedy by Eddie Gibb

Another article which tries to trace the sources of the humour of FATHER TED. Significantly, it cites the Irishness of the comedy which makes it acceptable. The writer concludes: "There's a long tradition in Irish comedy of blokes talking surreal nonsense at great length, but the fact that they are priests intensifies the pleasure."

SCOTLAND ON SUNDAY

1 March 1998

High priests of comedy by Tom Lappin

Excellent piece on the history and success of FATHER TED. It contains the intriguing quote which states: "Remove the jokes and Father Ted would be Kafka, a saga of four obsessives condemned to each other's company, terminally unable to understand each other." The article also contains interesting quotes from co-writer Mathews who also mentions the impact on the Simpsons, the Larry Sanders Show and Seinfeld had on his and Graham Linehan's way of thinking.

SUNDAY TIMES

15 March 1998

Last Rites by Carol Sarler

A poignant last interview with Dermot Morgan which took place a week before the actor died. The interview traces Dermot's struggle to get established and the phenomenal success of Father Ted. It also notes Dermot Morgan's ambition to move on after Father Ted and work in Britain.

WEBSITE

Father Ted Online

www.fathertedonline.ukf.net

A modest fan-site that keeps the series alive .

FAWLTY TOWERS

BOOKS

BRIGHT, Morris and **ROSS**, Robert

Fawlty Towers fully booked.

London: BBC, 2001. 192p., illus.

Useful history of the series, with detailed studies of the main characters as well as the minor regulars and the guest stars. Each episode is described in detail and there are comments from Cleese or one of the other cast members.

CLEESE, John and Connie Booth

The complete Fawlty Towers.

London: Methuen, 1988. 333p., illus.

Scripts to all 12 episodes. An earlier book, **FAWLTY TOWERS (Contact Books 1977)** has the scripts to just 3 shows from the first series but these are illustrated by copious frame stills.

MARGOLIS, Jonathan

Cleese Encounters.

London: Chapmans, 1992. 286p., illus., filmog.

An unauthorized biography of Cleese including a hefty 30 page chapter on Fawlty Towers.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

Classic Television

No.10. August/September 1999. pp.12-17.illus.article

Towering achievement by Paul Bamford

Pretty straightforward review of the series written at the time of the 25th anniversary of the show. Quite thorough in its appraisal of FAWLTY TOWERS' lasting appeal. It provides some interesting trivia information as well as mentioning the working relationship between John Cleese and Connie Booth.

PRESS ARTICLES

NEW SOCIETY

5 March 1981

Return to Farty Towels by Albert Hunt

Highly descriptive piece describing various situations that occur in FAWLTY TOWERS that add to its humour.

THE OBSERVER

4 June 1995

Television that was the era that was by John NAugusthton

Interesting short piece about repeats on the BBC demonstrating how well they stand the test of time. The particular focus is on the repeat showings of FAWLTY TOWERS. John NAugusthton purrs with admiration for the most perfect of all British sitcoms.

INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY

14 May 1995

To Hell With Basil by Andrew Davidson

Excellent interview with John Cleese looking back on the enduring appeal of FAWLTY TOWERS. The article reveals how much Cleese was paid per episode and the initial reticence of the BBC, and even the press, towards the show. The article goes into some detail on how the show was written and the length of time it took John Cleese and Connie Booth to hone the episodes. Revealingly, Cleese attributes the success of the show due to the cast and "20 hours in the edit suite for each episode" to ensure that the pace of the comedy was correct. The writer correctly concludes that "no one has ever matched the pace of FAWLTY TOWERS, the elements of farce and slapstick, and the inexorable turn of the screw that the best scripts provide.

WEBSITE

Fawltysite.net

www.fawltysite.net

A well intentioned fan site (endless references and quotes) which nevertheless provides excellent information about the show. It includes exhaustive blow by blow guides to all twelve episodes with full cast lists. The rest of the site is for addicts only!

LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN

BOOKS

PEMBERTON Steve, **GATISS** Mark, **SHEARSMITH** Reece, **DYSON** Jeremy

A Local Book for Local People

Fourth Estate, 2001. Page 128

This tie-in book, presented in a scrapbook style is aimed purely at the fans. The authors pay meticulous attention to detail in presenting the weird and the weirder residents of Royston Vasey.

LEWISOHN Mark

Radio Times guide to tv comedy

London: BBC, 1998. Page 461

An excellent introduction to the characters and plot mechanics of THE LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

TV ZONE

No.155 October 2002 p 10-18.illus.article

No. 156.November 2002 p.[16]-20.illus.article

Meet the Locals + To Royston Vasey

Everything you ever wanted to know about the LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN and more is contained in these two part features on the cult show. Part one traces the development of the programme and its path via Edinburgh comedy awards, to BBC radio. It introduces

the characters, the writers and the whole ethos of the programme. The second part examines the impact the series had with further useful insights and background information.

BROADCAST

21 November 2003 pp.20-21.illus.article

Eureka! by Peter Keighron

The LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN is included in a round-up of ground-breaking TV shows which managed to make it on to the screens despite initial scepticism from TV executives. It concludes with the simple notion that there is no substitute for a producer with passion.

BROADCAST

21 November 2003 p.22.illus.prod. report.credits

A League of their own

This short article (which includes the most often used headline to accompany articles about the series) is of interest for some background details about the amount of time and money that is spent on the costumes for the four main actors.

SHIVERS

No.74. February 2000 pp.8-11.article

Dark carnival: the rise and rise of The League of gentlemen by David Miller

The LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN talk about their programme with reference to their "homage" to British Horror films.

PRESS ARTICLES

SUNDAY TIMES

10 January 1999

A preview of the LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN, by Michael Wright, which is interesting since it alludes more to the cross-dressing of the actors rather than the dark, brooding nature of the comedy. It traces the rise of the cast via Perrier award winners onto BBC radio show.

THE GUARDIAN

11 January 1999

Phil Daoust previews the LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN's first appearance on BBC2. Of interest since it also gives background information how the cast made their progression from fringe comedy onto the TV screen.. It also manages to quote lines that became part of the catchphrases which became synonymous with the show: "Don't touch the things. This is a local shop for local people. There's nothing for you here."

THE SUN

20 January 1999

Unintentionally amusing short piece from the Sun which attempts to explain what has gone wrong with mainstream TV comedy. It reads like the rantings of a character from Royston Vasey itself.

THE GUARDIAN

14 September 2000

A league of their own by Danny Leigh

An interview with the cast/writers on the eve of the second series . Of interest in that it charts the cult celebrity status of the cast/writers rather than any attempt at analysing the dark nature of their comic parody.

THE GUARDIAN

15 October 2000

On the eve of their live tour, founder member Jeremy Dyson explains the origins of their peculiarly dark brand of humour. He admits that the LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN is "barely on nodding terms with conventional comedy," but is quick to contextualise the show in terms of its horror routes. He concludes by stating "There are many ways to elicit Laughter. One of them is to prod an area of discomfort or uncertainty until you get a response."

THE GUARDIAN

23 September 2002

Mark Lawson reports on three British sitcoms COUPLING, THE OFFICE and The LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN (all which were returning to BBC2 in the same week). He puts the case forward that American comedy sitcoms have not killed off our home-grown talent.

EVENING STANDARD

27 September 2002

Pete Clark pours out praise about the LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN, which he rates as "the most invigorating and entertaining programme on television." For fans of dark, brooding humour his analysis of the programme is definitely rose tinted.

WEBSITE

www.leagueofgentlemen.co.uk

Labour of love fan site which provides excellent indepth background information about various aspects of the show. Of particular interest is the section which looks at the Hammer Horror type of influences seen throughout the series.

LITTLE BRITAIN

OK, so this isn't a sit-com. You might want to ponder what makes it a character-comedy sketch show instead. It seems to follow on "logically" from LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN in this guide and until we produce something on other strands of the comedy genre, it will stay here.

BOOKS

LUCAS, Matt and **WALLIAMS**, David
Little Britain. The complete scripts and that: series one.
London: Harper Collins, 2004. 256p., col. illus.

Exactly as it says: the scripts from season one.

PRESS ARTICLES

DAILY TELEGRAPH
16 December 2003 p19

The Show we'll all soon be watching, by Dominic Cavendish

Relatively descriptive piece that includes some thoughts from Matt Lucas and David Walliams.

DAILY TELEGRAPH
4 December 2003 p23

Why this man really should be Laughing, by Tom Leonard

Partly an interview with Jon Plowman discussing what makes good comedy, at a time when LITTLE BRITAIN was breaking on television. There is some information and opinion on other comedy shows, including some other programmes covered in this guide.

SUNDAY TELEGRAPH
30 November 2003, p3,5

[Review], by Giles Smith

Talks about the series and its origins on BBC Radio 4 (a route to TV which Hancock among others took 40 plus years ago rather than anything very new), discussing topicality and the nature of sketch shows.

GUARDIAN – the guide
13 September 2003, pp8-10

Cruel Britannia, by Sarah Dempster

General discussion of the programme looking at most of the darker aspects and giving a breakdown of some of the main, regular, characters that appear in the show.

MY FAMILY

At the time of compilation there was no book material available on this series.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

IN THE PICTURE
No.46. April 2003 pp.19-22

Happy Families? by Roy Stafford

MY FAMILY is used as an example in this piece concerned with the study of representation, and the requirement that students should compare two texts when approaching their studies.

SIGHT & SOUND
Vol.13. No.6 June 2003 p.7

Ghostworlds, by Rob White

The writer questions why the then current crop of sitcoms lack the rage and pain of previous shows, and also points out shoddy production values. MY FAMILY is one of those included.

There is follow-up by way of correspondence from Phil Wickham, an expert in the field, in the following issue (Letters, p 68, July 2003) who suggests that in fact Rob White's view is too selective, and that, in fact, this was a strong period for the sitcom.

PRESS ARTICLES

DAILY TELEGRAPH
16 September 2000, p29, illus.

Show writer Fred Barron reveals the methods he and his team use

The title says it all really.

GUARDIAN
29 September 2000, pp12-13, illus.

Popular Front by Michael Billington

Helpful article because it compares the way sitcom in the UK and sitcoms in the US are put together; Lindsay talks about how he, Zoe Wanamaker and the rest of the cast work from their own characters and experience, and there is some information about the writing team as well.

INDEPENDENT
23 September 2000, p.8, illus.

Comedy to get your teeth into by Brian Viner

Overview of the series that focuses on the role played by Fred Barron, one of the creative forces behind SEINFELD and THE LARRY SANDERS SHOW, in which he reveals that he has tailored the scripts to the actors. This could raise some issues of comparison, as well as consideration of whether sitcoms can work if they are seen as star vehicles.

NIGHTY NIGHT

At the time of compiling this list, no books had been published about NIGHTY NIGHT.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

RADIO TIMES

13 – 19 Mar 2004, p.34

Nighty Nightmare, by Sarah Shannon

Overview of the series prior to its BBC2 run, which suggests that the influence of series such as LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN is leading to darker and darker sitcoms...

RADIO TIMES

27 Mar – 2 April 2004, p.57

Comedy – the final frontier, by Alison Graham

Brief article that questions why drama can be cruel but sitcom has less license to do so. This might trigger some thoughts about “the monster” figure, Jill, portrayed by Julyia Davis.

PRESS ARTICLES

EVENING STANDARD

16 Mar 2004, p 29.

Sick, yes, but just so funny, by Victor Lewis-Smith

Over-view and an analysis that does talk about the taboo areas that this programme sets out to challenge – via comedy.

GUARDIAN

19 April 2004, p.16

The Witches, by Gareth McLean

Argues that comedy has been full of women behaving badly, but NIGHTY NIGHT has a woman who is a direct descendant of the sitcom “monster”. Julyia Davis, Reece Shearsmith, Arabella Weir and Catherine Tate offer their views.

THE OFFICE

JOURNAL ARTICLES

Screen

Vol.45. No.1 Spring 2004 pp.63-78

A detailed analysis of THE OFFICE in reference to how it bucks the trend of the essentially stable and conservative trend of traditional British sitcoms. The article argues that THE OFFICE is the apotheosis of the new type sitcom which deliberately uses characteristics of other television forms. This leads the writer to talk about Comedy verité and how THE OFFICE not only works on the level of a traditional sit-com but also works on a new level as a parody of a television genre.

EMMY

Vol. 26. No.2.March 2004. pp.18-19.illus.interview

Having just won a Golden Globe Ricky Gervais talks about working on THE OFFICE. The article is quite short but presents an interesting view since the interviewer is American and so, Gervais’s responses are illuminating in their transatlantic translations.

PRESS ARTICLES

GUARDIAN

3 July 2001

SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

7 July 2001

Two short pieces embracing THE OFFICE. Both reviewers point out the comic potential of the show. In fact the Telegraph writer admits to re-winding their preview tape after David Brent’s two minute opening sequence

EVENING STANDARD

10 July 2001

By Victor Lewis Smith

Excellent example of an article which hates THE OFFICE (and with the benefit of hindsight is proved completely wrong). It contains such seemingly uninformed observations about the standard of acting (unable to make the association with the fly on the wall documentary format) and provides the following scathing line: “How this dross ever got beyond the pilot stage is a mystery.”

NEW STATESMAN

16 July 2001

Beeb gets all boss-eyed by Andrew Billen

Article in praise of THE OFFICE full of quotes and fairly routine analysis of the David Brent character.

THE GUARDIAN

23 September 2002

Mark Lawson reports on three British sitcoms COUPLING, THE OFFICE AND THE LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN (all which were returning to BBC2 in the same week). He puts the case forward that American comedy sitcoms have not killed off our home-grown talent. His analysis of how the humour in THE OFFICE wouldn’t work in a conventional sitcom is well observed.

THE TIMES

28 September 2002

Beyond the cringe by Paul Connolly

This article contains some observations from Ricky Gervais about how his characters are trapped in a lower-middle class environment, knowing that they could do better but opting for the comfort of their 9-5 jobs.

OBSERVER

6 October 2002, p20

Television [Reviews]

by Andrew Anthony

As the second series of THE OFFICE was about to be screened Andrew Anthony's thoughtful piece picks out the appeal of the programme and anticipates problems in sustaining the fly on the wall format.

TELEGRAPH MAGAZINE

August 2002

The Big Cheese by Ben Thompson

Quite lengthy interview with Ricky Gervais about the first series of THE OFFICE. In it he sights some influences but mainly talks about the construction of the programme (setting up the tedium of an office environment that people can instantly identify with) and then building in the comic potential.

DAILY TELEGRAPH (ARTS+BOOKS)

9 February 2002, pA12

Class of 2002: Ricky Gervais, comic actor, by Dominic Cavendish

Another short interview with Ricky Gervais. This one looks back at Gervais' first stabs at television comedy and discusses Gervais' own experiences of working in office environments.

DAILY TELEGRAPH

29 February 2003

The Office is now closed by Gerard O'DoNovemberan

Review of the Office xmas special and relections on the series as a whole.

GUARDIAN

31 December 2003

Not shrill like Sybil or silly like Bridget by Madeleine Bunting

Dawn in the office as first comic heroine who is not idiotic.

GUARDIAN

17 October 2002

In dysfunctional Britain the Office is now our home by Jonathan Freedland

What the Office says about modern Britain

WEBSITE

www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/theoffice

As you might expect from the BBC a thorough site which gives prominent voices to the two writers Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant. Along with detailed episode and character listings the writers also answer questions from fans. A nice touch on the site is a layout of THE OFFICE

featuring everyone's desks and amusing graphics which can show you a banana which Tim has discarded.

ONE FOOT IN THE GRAVE

BOOKS

ROOSE-EVANS, James.

One Foot on the Stage, The biography of Richard Wilson

London: 236p., illus.

Chapter 11 covers ONE FOOT IN THE GRAVE in some detail, focusing on specific episodes that provoked particular reaction from some viewers. Why this was so may provide some insights into whether there are some subjects that are outside "normal" – or perhaps traditional – sitcom parameters, and why this might be.

PRESS ARTICLES

LISTENER

11 January 1990 pp 38-9

TV Review section includes a fairly brief comment or two on the then new programme, and whilst it doesn't quite condemn with faint praise, there is only a relatively minor sense that this is in any way lasting or out of the ordinary. Still, it is interesting to see what was made of a show that subsequently entered (part of) the national consciousness.

TV TIMES

14 January 1995, pp16-17

This Man's the real Victor Meldrew and you won't believe him!, by Mary Fletcher

An interview with the show's writer David Renwick, looking at the Meldrew character.

TV TIMES

14 October 2000, pp 16-17

Both feet in the grave, by Pam Francis

In an interview with Richard Wilson, as part of a 6-page comedy special, the killing off of the Victor Meldrew character – and with it the series itself is discussed.

ONLY FOOLS & HORSES

BOOKS

CLARK, Steve

The Only Fools and Horses Story. A celebration of the legendary comedy series

London:BBC Worldwide, 1998. 166p., illus (mainly col.).

Information on all the main cast members, and the writer, John Sullivan, an episode guide and background material on each series up to the 1996 Christmas trilogy (and a Comic Relief special) including some missing scenes. Ideal overview if you are studying this series.

PRESS ARTICLES

TIMES

22 December 2001

Divine Comedy. (Pick of the Season), by Victoria Segal

Preview of one of the Christmas specials, post- Del and Rodney becoming millionaires, which does raise a question: if you transfer characters from their normal milieu to another location does this affect the humour?

GUARDIAN

28 January 1997

Playing with Fire, by Mike Kivi

In dealing with reported comments by the Chief Inspector of Schools about ONLY FOOLS... some comments about the quality of the programme and its place in popular culture are made

INDEPENDENT

22 January 1997,p3

Nation of Fools and Tolkien readers, by Judith Judd

Again an article about the comments of the Chief Inspector of Schools condemning the programme as being a threat to educational standards; various counter-claims are made.

SUNDAY TIMES SECTION 5

23 December 1990, pp2-3

The Other Side of Del Boy, by Kate Saunders

Based on an interview with David Jason, in the context of promoting a Christmas Special, which talks a bit about the writer, John Sullivan, and how he developed the characters, and how the actors – especially Jason – add depth to them, based in his case on his early experiences learning his craft.

OBSERVER

18 Mar 1990, p63

How the Beeb bets on fools and horses, by Nicholas Fraser

Although this focuses on ONLY FOOLS..., it provides useful insight into the process by which sitcoms get the green light, in the context partly of John Sullivan's career and of the "quality" of staff at the BBC. It also refers to the running time and format of a typical BBC half-hour slot as lending itself to quality in comparison with that on ITV.

NEW SOCIETY

14 Mar 1985, p406

Keeping it in the family, by Simon Hoggart

Straightforward review of the series, pointing out some apparent plot deficiencies, describing the basic set-up and adding brief opinions as to what makes a sitcom work.

PORRIDGE

BOOKS

CLEMENT, Dick & LA FRENAIS, Ian (edited by Richard Webber)

Porridge: the Scripts.

London: Headline, 2002. 416p.i,illus.

The scripts of this classic sitcom.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

TV ZONE.n169.November p.32-37.illus.article.credits

TV ZONE.n170.December 2003

An exhaustive two-part look at PORRIDGE and associated programmes. The first part includes a cast list, detailed episode breakdown, and character profiles of Fletcher and Godber. The article traces the beginnings of the show and talks about how the writers Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais, had doubts about whether they could make a sitcom based in a prison work. It is also interesting to note the enthusiastic contribution that Ronnie Barker made to the character of Fletcher. The first part ends with the show established as an unexpected success.

The second article follows Porridge into series three and through its Christmas special and on to the less successful spin-off Going Straight. As well as giving more episode details and details of the film version, the article includes a panel featuring merchandise from the show.

TELEVISION TODAY

10 Mar 1977 p.18

A tiny review written during the third series of Porridge. The review purrs over the ensemble cast and the intelligent script by Clement and La Frenais.

VARIETY TV REVIEWS

2 October 1974

Porridge, by "Watt".

An American take on the programme, well after its UK peak, but despite the different usages of analytical terms it does do a fair job at describing what the humour hinges on, and, in passing gives an insight into differences between US and UK styles.

PRESS ARTICLES

THE SUN

28 August 1974

Ronnie signs on for a six-week stretch in jail, by Philip Phillips

Small piece which explains how PORRIDGE came to be picked out of seven short comedies and it has some useful quotes from Ronnie Barker. It is interesting that the other show in contention would later become OPEN ALL HOURS.

TIMES

6 September 1974

[Review] by Stanley Reynolds

This piece suggests that PORRIDGE hit the floor running in terms of popularity as opposed to other sitcoms which needed some bedding in time (such as STEPTOE and DAD'S ARMY).

WEBSITE

Porridge The Unofficial Website

www.porridge.org.uk

A fan site which gives a concise summary of all the episodes and includes profiles, galleries and a good selection of sound clips. The site also includes GOING STRAIGHT.

www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/guide/articles/p/porridge

The BBC's website is a bit of a no thrills affair but contains all the information someone wanting to know about PORRIDGE needs.

RAB C. NESBITT

BOOKS

PATTISON, Ian

Rab C. Nesbitt: the scripts

London : BBC Books, 1990. 176p. illus

This compilation features scripts written by Ian Pattison from the first six shows in the series – Work, Rat, Holiday, Drink, Offski, and City of Culture. Of interest to readers who want to brush up on the Rab C. Nesbitt vernacular, or indeed, quote some philosophical lines such as the following from Drink: "Once you realise you're never gonny be somebody yi have to kid yourself on that being a naebody can still be interesting. So is it any wonder us low forms of life get blootered."

BRADBURY, David and MCGRATH, Joe

Now that's funny!: writers on writing comedy

London : Methuen, 1998. Page 129

Excellent background details about the creation of Rab C. Nesbitt from an interview with its writer Ian Pattison. Probably the best piece of information about the programme including some useful insights on the influences that formed the character of Rab. It also contains some interesting detail on Ian Pattison's approach to sitcom writing.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

TELEVISION TODAY

No. 5797. 21 May 1992. p.21.

A case of old, new, borrowed, blue

Review by Moira Petty

Short scathing paragraph about the series.

TELEVISION TODAY

No. 5758.22 August 1991. p.18.

He's Rabbing the limelight by John Moore

Article looking at comedian Gregor Fisher, with a detailed look at his career and the success of his character and series RAB C. NESBITT. Useful on the perspective that Gregor Fisher gives on the character of Rab. Also interesting speculation as to whether more shows would be made (the series went on until 1999).

RADIO TIMES

Vol.267.No. 3493. 24 November 1990. p.103.

Letters about the series and accents

TELEVISION TODAY

No.5712. 4 October 1990. p.19.

Review by Suzan Leavy

Interesting, cringe-making review of the first programme in the series. Whilst acknowledging the superb performances of the cast, the reviewer remains unconvinced about its longevity: "one wonders how long he can sustain laughs in a six part series".

TIME OUT

No.1049. 26 September. 1990. p.51.

Gregor Fisher talks about the series

PRESS ARTICLES

THE TIMES

5 June 1992

Alien life forms

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

16 July 1992

Burning the Scots

Both these short pieces take a somewhat patronising view of RAB C. NESBITT's Glaswegian accent. An interesting early London-centric view of the series. The writer's are unable to see the ground-breaking potential of the programme.

DAILY MAIL

22 May 1992

Scot with a taste of Porridge

TIME OUT

24 November 1993

Gift of the Rab

Two more short articles with similar themes both charting the cult following that RAB C. NESBITT had acquired by the time of its second series.

EVENING STANDARD

19 November 1993

Victor Lewis-Smith's combines patronising views about the standard of output from BBC Scotland with a "I've-always-liked-it" nod of approval to the cult status of RAB C. NESBITT.

GUARDIAN

20 November 1993

RAB C. NESBITT TV scum-u-like urban philosopher, has made myth of Glasgow's Govan district, Pat Kane asks how much the locals applaud his bawdy transition of myth to mirth

Slightly serious, but nevertheless interesting look at views of working class people from the Govan district of Glasgow of their hero Rab. The writer earnestly tries to separate the cult myth created by writer Ian Pattison, from the reality of the people that Rab is meant to parody. Unsurprisingly, the response from the interviewees is stoic.

THE SCOTSMAN

3 August 1997

Rab C. Nesbitt is back...with the most controversial storyline yet

Humour in the Tumour

Long article dealing with the rise of RAB C. NESBITT's popularity and it explores the taboos that the series has been unafraid of tackling. It acknowledges RAB C. NESBITT's important position as a politically incorrect, social comedy of the 1990s.

RISING DAMP

BOOKS

SELF, David, editor.

Situation Comedy

London: Hutchinson, 1980. 176p., illus.

A number of scripts in one volume, including the GREAT EXPECTATIONS episode of RISING DAMP. There are some useful follow-up activities suggested and a brief background piece in the introduction on the series as well as a brief article on the writer. Pages 20-23 cover "Comedy and Realism".

TANITCH, Robert

Leonard Rossiter

Robert Royce, 1985. 100p., illus.

This warm mainly pictorial tribute to the career of Leonard Rossiter was produced shortly after his death in 1984. There is a short section covering RISING DAMP with contributions from writer Eric Chappell, director Vernon Lawrence and actors Don Warrington and Frances de la Tour. Although many of the comments read like a tribute there are a few press cuttings included which add a little more substance to the section. The book also contains a brief page on the ill-advised film version of Rising Damp which was made shortly after the death of actor Richard Beckinsale.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

TELEVISION TODAY

4 December 1975. p.13

Cult TV.

Vol.2. No.3.March 1998. pp.70-71

Two wafer thin reviews of RISING DAMP. The first, written in 1975 shortly after the series had started, expresses doubts about its longevity, while the second review in the 1990s Cult TV is written with the benefit of hindsight. It's worth reading these just as a comparison.

PRESS ARTICLES

THE SUN

1 June 1974

If You Liked Hitler, You'll Love Mr Rooksby, by Chris Kenworthy

Written three months before the first episode of RISING DAMP the "sensational Sun" stokes up a storm by comparing Rigsby to Alf Garnet. The character of Rooksby is not a misprint. Rising Damp was based on a play written by Eric Chappell called The Banana Box. The Landlord character in that was called Rooksby.

DAILY TELEGRAPH

8 November 1975

[Review], by Sylvia Clayton.

A short review about the start of the second series. Interesting to note the restrained tone of the piece.

DAILY EXPRESS

13 April 1977

Rising to new heights of comedy, by Jason Thomas

Another short review but by now the programme is acknowledged as one of the funniest programmes that ITV has ever produced.

WEBSITE

Rigsby Online

www.leonardrossiter.com/risingdamp

By far the most comprehensive details about RISING DAMP can be found on this exhaustive website. The plethora of information contains : The Story of Rising Damp, A scene-by-scene episode guide, script excerpts, a full list of cast and characters, a photo gallery, some video clips, message board and even a Rigsby online store.

THE ROYLE FAMILY

BOOKS

AHERNE, Caroline, **CASH**, Craig, and **NORMAL**, Henry

The Royle Family. The scripts: series 1.

London: Granada Media, 1999. 180p., col.illus.

As well as the scripts for the first season, there is a section (pp 172-179) of reviews of that season from a range of broadsheet and other papers at a time when the series had not quite fully been worked out by the reviewers, perhaps because it challenged received notions of what was and what was not a sitcom...

JOURNAL ARTICLES

RADIO TIMES

14-20 October 2000, pp 35-6, illus.

It's a boy!, by Alison Graham

A brief article covering the introduction of the Royle baby, together with a brief script extract. What may also be worth considering is that the BBC's Radio Times ran two features on this BBC series in successive issues (see below). Why might that be?

TV TIMES

14 October 2000 pp.12-13, illus.

Who'd live in a house like this? By Olly Grant

A not too serious guide to the ROYLE FAMILY and their sitting room.

RADIO TIMES

21-27 October 2000, pp 20, 22, illus.

We are amused, by Brian Viner

A piece that has Caroline Aherne and Craig Cash talking about one another's qualities, and how these feed in to the show.

METRO

No.134 2002, pp 230-231, illus.

TV Eye: The Royles (not chocolate) I love, by Lyn Chatham

An Australian perspective on the series, which reminds us that most TV sitcoms don't actually feature a TV set, but goes on to raise (one of) the central issues of the programme: is it sending up the working class family, by patronising them?

TILL DEATH US DO PART

NB It is often worth checking material written about Warren Mitchell, because journalists and sub-editors often found it hard to avoid any mention of the "Alf" character in interviews etc. This says something about the nature of the reach the Garnett character enjoyed, but it also tends to overlook the rest of Warren Mitchell's excellent work.

BOOKS

SPEIGHT, Johnny

Till Death Us Do Part scripts

London: Woburn Press, 1973. 158p., illus.

The scripts cover transmissions between 1966 and 1972, edited slightly to reduce camera and stage direction. Before the scripts start, there are brief newspaper reviews of the show, and of the Alf Garnett character, which are particularly useful in discussions about larger than life characters, monsters etc. There are also brief biographies of the main cast, and recording and transmission dates are listed.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

PRIMETIME

Vol.1. No.12 Spring/Summer 1987, pp12-19

Comedy Cross-overs: Brit.Sits.Hit Blitz, by Dick Fiddy

In a wide-ranging article on the exchange of programme ideas and series between the UK and the USA, the well-known TV Historian looks at TILL DEATH US DO PART (and also STEPTOE) in relation to their US versions. In de-constructing some of the characters and changes, clues appear as to the nature of the genre. (pp14 and 16 are key).

RADIO TIMES

2 September 1989, p6

National Alf Service, by Gay Search

After 25 years of appearing as the Alf Garnett character, Warren Mitchell talks about the things that have influenced his portrayal.

PRESS ARTICLES

DAILY TELEGRAPH

7 June 1966

BBC Series cockney in its humour, by P.J. K [Peter Knight]

Early review for this series, playing safe by sticking mainly to description but also clearly identifying the prejudices of the central characters, and generally positive in tone. Interesting choice for a heading to the review: it may tell you something about the newspaper at the time...

DAILY MAIL

12 July 1966

[Review], by Peter Black

Brief review noting that the World Cup was also on TV at this time, but giving some thought to what kind of character Alf Garnett is.

DAILY EXPRESS

14 January 1967

Oi, Alf!...why spoil a good show with bad language, by James Thomas

Discussion about the swearing in the programme, and whether it offends and whether it is necessary. Some things never change...

EVENING STANDARD

21 February 1968

Viewers, you were looking at yourselves!, by Milton Shulman

An analysis of the character, and a discussion about prejudices based on the attempts to have the programme taken off the air because of the various sensibilities that were upset by the remarks made by the characters.

OBSERVER REVIEW

25 February 1968

At Alf Garnett's wake, by George Melly

In a lengthy discussion at the time the programme was being taken off air, Melly raises a number of issues about the BBC and its attitude towards its own programmes, and suggests that Alf is a Pere Ubu type character with a didactic function.

DAILY MAIL

26 October 1972

[Review], by Peter Black

Black reflects on having suggested Speight should avoid reviving the show, but on balance is pleased because the show – though less good than in the past – is still streets ahead of the competition. He talks about Speight's strengths as a writer and on his modifications to the situation the family find themselves in.

SPECTATOR

12 January 1974, p?

Alf's return, by Clive Gammon

Relatively brief review of the attempt to revive the series in the 1970s, which says a little about the Garnett character traits.

MAIL ON SUNDAY

31 March 1985, p3

Alf is back!, by Jonathan Margolis.

Primarily a piece to launch the sequel "IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH" with some choice extracts of the many rants that Alf has in store...

VICAR OF DIBLEY

BOOKS

BOWYER, Alison

Dawn French. The Biography.

London: Headline, 2000. 309p., illus., index.

There are a few very useful pages about "Dibley" which shed some light on the origins of the character and the success of the series, which manages to combine a certain old-fashioned quality that enables it to reach a wide audience, with a knack of upsetting people on the odd occasion.

GRAY, Frances.

Women and Laughter.

London: Macmillan Press, 1994. 202p. bibliog. index.

A detailed analysis and feminist critique of women in all forms of comedy from stage to television screen. It tackles the subject in three parts: part I - theory, Part II - sitcom and Part III - stand-up. It deals with the range of female stereotypes and the differences in choice of material between men and women. It also discusses various comic styles and analyses the success of women in mainstream comedy.

Chapter three, "British sitcom: a rather sad story", in particular examines British television sitcoms in respect to women.

It includes several sections on the career of Dawn French in which her image and style are discussed and also the strength of her appeal.

PUTTERMAN, Barry

On television and comedy: essays on style, theme, performer and writer.

Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1995. i-x. 21 Op. Illus. index.

Although this evaluation concentrates largely upon American comedians and programmes, the impact of British alternative comedians from the "Comic Strip" stable on American comedy is analysed. It also includes a detailed chapter on the comic style of French and Saunders. (French and Saunders: anatomy of a comedy team, pp. 180-188).

JOURNAL ARTICLES

RADIO TIMES

Vol.283. No.3695 5 November 1994, pp.37-38

The Funniest Man Not On TV by Carol Sarler

Article on writer Richard Curtis, giving details of his career to date and especially THE VICAR OF DIBLEY.

RADIO TIMES

Vol.283. No.3697 19 November 1994, pp.38-39,41

Sisters Of The Cloth by Laurie Graham

Graham meets curate Joy Carroll who was the inspiration for the series and helped Dawn French prepare for the role of Geraldine.

TELEVISION TODAY

No.5927 17 November 1994, p.22

Brilliance Makes This A Dickens of An Adaptation, by James Towler Brief

Review.

PRESS

The following reviews and articles are held on microfiche at the BFI Reference Library under the title THE VICAR OF DIBLEY.

Reviews

TIMES

25 November 1998 p.2

DAILY TELEGRAPH

28 May 1998 p.3

INDEPENDENT

25 January 1998 p.9

INDEPENDENT EYE

16 January 1998 p.3

DAILY TELEGRAPH

9 January 1998 p.46

DAILY TELEGRAPH (TV)

5 November 1994 p.3

THE GUARDIAN (section 2)

11 November 1994 p.20

THE INDEPENDENT

11 November 1994 p.24

SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

20 November 1994 p.9

EVENING STANDARD

9 December 1994 p.31

Articles

THE SUNDAY TIMES

27 November 1994 p. 10

Stranded In No Mans Land, by A.A.Gill

Discusses the male bias of British television in general. Uses THE VICAR OF DIBLEY as an example of a "women's comedy".

THE TIMES (TV)

5 November 1994 p.5

Under Starters Orders, by Helen Kirby

Interview with Richard Curtis and Joy Carroll, the female vicar who was his inspiration for the series.

THE INDEPENDENT

11 November 1994 (Arts Section) p.29

Turned Out Nice Again, by Mark Wareham

Dawn French had sworn never to act in a sitcom. In this interview she discusses her character in THE VICAR OF DIBLEY, how different it is to act in a traditional sitcom compared to her usual working environment and the author Richard Curtis.

WEBSITES

www.tvheaven.ca/dibley.htm

This is a fan site. It has stills, some cast and credit information including other roles cast-members have played elsewhere, and it includes some extracts of dialogue and some of the closing jokes that end each episode.

www.beebfun.com/dibley.htm

This is a general site in whose owner argues how strong DIBLEY is in the great tradition of BBC comedy. Has links to other relevant sites.

www.phill.co.uk/comedy.vicar

This is a useful site for cast, credits, episode guides and detail on characters.

YES MINISTER

BOOKS

LYNN, Jonathan and Antony Jay

The complete Yes Minister

London: BBC Books, 1989. 514p., illus.

A novel approach to the scripts book with each episode written up as if a diary entry for the Hon. Jim Hacker himself.

SELF, David, editor.

Situation Comedy 2

London: Hutchinson, 1984. 176p. illus.

Reproduction of scripts from several UK sitcoms, including YES MINISTER. The episode in this case is THE RIGHT TO KNOW. At the end of the book are suggested discussion points and projects, and working with these can only be helpful, especially if there are several of you to work together. The introduction to the book includes some background on the series, and the writers are also profiled briefly.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

CULT TV

v2.n1. January 1998. p.66. review

Lightweight review of repeat showings of the series. The writer does make the point the show remains politically neutral and that it is more to do with a satire on bureaucratic fudge than politics.

AUDIO VISUAL

No.143. November 1983. p.106

A tiny curiosity in the Training section of Audio Visual which refers to a specific episode of YES MINISTER about Jim Hacksters thwarted attempts to bring more women into his department.

VARIETY

22 April 1981

A typical American approach in this review, which gets to the nub of what characterises the sitcom, but bemoans the lack of action and reliance on repartee .

PRESS ARTICLES

SUNDAY TIMES

29 March 1981

The Master's Voice by Gerald Kaufman

MP Gerald Kaufman marks the cards of YES MINISTER in an article which reveals that researchers approached him in the first place. Despite some reservations he concedes that "Yes Minister performs a valuable service by telling viewers something important about the way in which their country is governed."

THE SUN

4 June 1983

20 Things You Never Knew About Yes Minister by Chris Kenworthy

For those who prefer to make lists, here are barely 20 items worth noting. Nevertheless the items mentioned do give some interesting background knowledge about the creation of YES MINISTER.

NEW YORK TIMES

14 June 1987

BBC Sitcom Proves Politics Has Its Laughs by John J. Connor

An interesting American perspective of YES MINISTER which concludes that it is better than any US attempts at political satire. The writer is enthusiastic about the show and gives several excellent examples of situations in the series which give a good flavour of what made Yes Minister so successful.

WEBSITE

The Yes (Prime) Minister Files

www.yes-minister.com

Well presented site which includes both YES MINISTER and YES PRIME MINISTER. It contains episode guides, photos and a database of terms and references used throughout the series. Those browsing are also encouraged to vote for various favourite bits and pieces in the series.

www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/guide/articles/y/yesminister

The BBC's website is informative and carries useful information but gives little beyond the basics.

CHEERS

BOOKS

BJORKLUND Dennis A.

Toasting Cheers: an episode guide to the 1982-1993 comedy series, with cast biographies and character profiles

Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1997. p407. illus., biog

Everything you've ever wanted to know about CHEERS and more is contained in this exhaustive piece of work. The book includes a historical overview charting the rise of the series, mini-biographies of all the cast members (including extensive tv and filmographic information), and a chapter devoted to the actual CHEERS bar. Perhaps the most impressive details are left to the last two chapters which provide biographies of the characters themselves including their likes, dislikes and explanations about their various relationships within the CHEERS community; this is followed by a series by series, episode by episode summary of all the plot-lines with writing credits. To complete the book there is also an appendix which provides details of all the awards that CHEERS won in its eleven year stint.

WENGER Mark

The Cheers trivia book

New York: Carol 1994, Page 150

Although this is merely a slim trivia quiz book, it at least gives glimpses into the general feeling for the series, and in so doing, provides snippets of information unavailable elsewhere.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

TV GUIDE

Vol.41. No.20.15 May 1993. pp.8-14.illus.article

Tears for Cheers by Deborah Starr Saeibel

Article about the last recording of CHEERS. It features some odd bits of trivia (such as the cost of the tab at the bar that Norm was likely to have accrued over 275 episodes) plus some quotes from the cast about the impact the show had made on their careers.

JOURNAL OF BROADCASTING & ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Vol.39. No.3.Summer 1995 pp.350-359.article

The Naturalization of Beer in Cheers by Heather C. Hindley

Fascinating, if somewhat quirky, sociological study on the theme of beer in CHEERS. The article looks at how by using themes of humour, camaraderie and detoxification, the programme was able to portray beer drinking as a normal and socially acceptable activity. This is put in the context of the potential attacks that the health lobby might have thrown at the show.

WIDE ANGLE

Vol.12. No.2. April 1990. p.64-73.illus.article

Where everybody knows your name by Michelle Hilmes

What looks like it might be a socio-economic look at CHEERS ends up being an article which reflects on the balance that the show presents between high and low culture. The writer concludes that all allegiances are accommodated in an atmosphere of relaxation, escape and acceptance. The article contains some useful snippets of dialogue to illustrate her points.

PRESS ARTICLES

NEW YORK TIMES

30 September 1982

TV: 2 Comedy Series Have Their Premieres by John J. O'Connor

Interesting preview of the forthcoming series where the writer, correctly anticipates the potential in the show.

DAILY MAIL

2 July 1983, p16

[Review]

28 June 1986, p20

What's all the cheering about?

Two interesting short articles from Mary Kenny. The first in which she says she sat stony-faced through an episode of CHEERS, the second, which occurs three years later, acknowledges the popularity of the show – much to the puzzlement of the writer.

THE TIMES

25 May 1985, p19

Cheering Company, by Peter Ackroyd.

A short article in praise of CHEERS and also a criticism of British sitcoms poor and predictable output.

NEW YORK TIMES

16 March 1986, p427

How 'Cheers' Keeps its Sparkle, by Betty Goodwin

Nice glimpses of the creative process which steered CHEERS into its prominent position as a top sitcom. Of particular interest were the revisions in the script, sometimes suggested by the actors, which kept the show so fresh for so long.

THE GUARDIAN

7 June 1993, p14

Three tears for Cheers by Nick Hornby

Slightly verbose analysis of the enduring appeal of CHEERS as it approached its last episode. Hornby does however, attempt to define the difference between British sitcom of the time, quoting from the forgettable ON THE UP and then contrasting it with a diatribe from

Woody in CHEERS.

EVENING STANDARD

14 June 1993, p45

Where everybody knows the game, by Matthew Norman

Statistic laden tribute to the final episode of CHEERS, again attempting to explain, and in so to acknowledging, why the show was such a success.

New Statesman and Society

18 June 1993, p36

The loose loafers of "Cheers" find the meaning of life – and the secret of great comedy, by Jaci Stephen

Another post-last episode article about the impact of CHEERS. This piece asks the question Why aren't British sitcoms funny? and uses CHEERS as the benchmark by which to be measured. Like many articles, it is fascinated at how refreshing the humour in CHEERS seems compared with British sitcoms.

THE COSBY SHOW

BOOKS

ADLER, Bill

The Cosby Wit. His Life and Humor

New York: Quill, 1986. 125p., illus.

Fairly slim volume but it does have chapter about THE COSBY SHOW, written not long after the show first aired in the USA. Interesting for the views attributed by Cosby to programme commissioners, regarding films for a black audience and has several pages of anecdotes about the show.

NB: most biographies of Bill Cosby talk about the show in some way. The non-biographical titles listed below tend to be more analytical.

BROOKER, Will and Jermyn, Deborah, eds.

The audience studies reader.

London, New York: Routledge, 2003, 347p., bibliog..

Chapter 27, "Enlightened Racism", by Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis, takes as its subject the COSBY SHOW, audiences and the myth of the American dream. Included are some comments from viewers, and a discussion about reality versus fiction within sections on positive images and the search for prosperity, and the battle for respect. The authors suggest the programme is well intentioned but diverts attention from class-based causes of racial inequality.

COLEMAN, Robin R. Means

African American Viewers and the Black Situation Comedy.

New York & London: Garland, 1998. 349p., bibliog., illus.

Chapter 6, pages 199 – 209 is specific to THE COSBY SHOW, but the whole of this book has something to offer if you are researching US shows.

DAVIES, Maire Messenger

Fake Fact and Fantasy. Children's interpretations of television reality.

Mahwah, New Jersey: Erlbaum, 1997. 244p., bibliog.

Chapter 9, pages 101-109, entitled "A Comedy Fiction type of thing: the Cosby Show" discusses the background to US sitcom formulae and then covers the reactions of US children to clips from the show.

GRAY, Herman

Watching Race: Television and the struggle for "Blackness".

Minneapolis: Minnesota Univ. Press, 1995. 201p., bibliog..

In chapter 5, on the politics of representation, the COSBY SHOW (p79: "The Cosby Moment") is used as an example. The author argues for its critical place in the discourse of the portrayal of black families on US television.

JHALLY, Sut and **LEWIS**, Justin, eds.

Enlightened Racism: the Cosby Show, audiences and the myth of the American Dream.

Boulder, Co., Oxford: Westview Press, 1992. 152p., bibliog..

Thorough analysis of the programme which at the time was America's most popular sitcom, examining viewer opinions in terms of class, race, choices and market constraints.

LEWIS Justin

The ideological Octoberopus. An exploration of television and its audience.

New York, London: Routledge, 1991. 218p.

Chapter 7 in part 2 takes the case of COSBY (pp159-202) and in a thorough analysis suggests that it does more for feminism than it does for racism.

MORREALE, January, editor.

Critiquing the sitcom. A Reader.

New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003. 357p., illus.

Chapter 12, Structural Analysis 1: Bill Cosby and recoding ethnicity, by Michael Real (pp224-246) demonstrates how the portrayal of black ethnicity in the COSBY SHOW contrasts with and challenges traditional stereotypes.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

VARIETY

26 September 1984, p82.

[Review by] "Bok"

Straightforward review of the show, describing its main elements, but clearly signaling that it will be a big hit.

MEDIA, CULTURE & SOCIETY
Vol. 11, no. 2, April 1989, pp 229-251

Class and gender in the hegemonic process: class differences in women's perceptions of television realism and identification with television characters, by Andrea Press.

In a comparison between American working class women and middle class women, the author uses both I LOVE LUCY and THE COSBY SHOW as case studies.

JOURNAL OF BROADCASTING & ELECTRONIC MEDIA
Vol. 41 no. 1, Winter 1997, pp 90 –108

Was the Revolution televised? Professional Criticism about "The Cosby Show" and the essentialization of Black Cultural Expression, by Lauren R Tucker.

This is really tracking the beliefs that inform the critics when they discuss the COSBY SHOW, and suggests that there are conflicting and even contradictory definitions of race and racial differences that tend to skew or perhaps reduce their ability to accurately dissect the series.

MEDIA, CULTURE & SOCIETY
Vol. 22 no. 4, July 2000, pp 371-391

"The Biggest Show in the World": race and the global popularity of the Cosby Show, by Timothy Havens.

An analysis of the popularity of the show, suggesting reasons for its huge success when compared with other US TV sitcoms.

PRESS ARTICLES

EBONY
April 1985, pp27-30, 34

The Cosby Show: the real life drama behind the hit TV show about a black family, by Lynn Norment

A lengthy piece giving plenty of information about the show and its success and gives some detail of the importance of Bill Cosby himself to the show.

FINANCIAL TIMES
13 August 1986, p11

Old Timers anew, by Frank Lipsius.

In an overview of the main US TV networks, Lipsius uses the COSBY SHOW as his main example of success.

INDEPENDENT
5 May 1992, p11

Farewell, Bill Cosby's black American dream, by Rupert Cornwell

Marking the end of the show, this piece rehearses two key issues: firstly, the show is apparently unbelievable, and, secondly, because it shows a successful black middle-class family, white viewers assume an air of indifference about real black problems.

FRASIER

BOOKS

BAILEY, David & MARTYN, Warren
Goodnight Seattle. The unauthorized guide to the world of Frasier.
London: Virgin Books, 1998. 330p.

A brief look at the characters, and a detailed breakdown of the first five seasons. An appendix lists main actors' previous credits and there is a detailed listing in another appendix of all the actors that have appeared in any of the episodes in the 5 seasons covered and the part they played.
Based on the UK transmission dates.

GRAHAM, Jefferson
Frasier
London: Pocket Books [Channel 4 Books], 1996, 277p., illus., some col.

Describes itself as the official companion to the series, and covers the story, the characters, a week in the life of Frasier, and an episode guide together with some choice extracts from scripts. Plus a trivia quiz!

LLOYD, Charles et al
The Best of Frasier.
London: Channel 4 Books, 1999. 294p., col.illus.

Fifteen complete scripts of the best episodes of Frasier, in case you need to remind yourself how they went. A very brief introduction describes the read-through process that the cast followed.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY
No 506, 8 October. 1999 pp 50-1

Musty TV?, by Ken Tucker

Questioning whether the (US) style sitcom format is dead, the author previews and compares the then forthcoming seasons of FRASIER, FRIENDS and STARK RAVING MAD.

EMMY
Vol. 23. No. 4, August 2001. pp.42-47, col. Illus.

Family Style by John Griffiths

The cast of FRASIER talk about their respective role, co-dependency and the show's evergreen status.

EMMY
Prime Time Special Issue No.3, 2004 pp 122-4, 126, illus.

Adventures of the Frasier Folks along the Road to an Emmy record by Michael Moses.

The episodes that won the Emmy awards are commented on by some of the stars and the executive producer, which may provide some insight into what those involved thought about their show.

FRESH PRINCE OF BEL AIR

BOOKS

BOGLE, Donald

Prime Time Blues. African Americans on Network Television.

New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001. 520p., illus., bibliog.

In this key work by a major author in the field of African American research, there is a small but beautifully formed section on FRESH PRINCE (pp.383-394), which explains the origins of the series, and in a quietly critical discourse suggests that if nothing else the series gave opportunity to provide a "safe" way for white audiences to "learn" about black culture – or perhaps just think they were learning.

ROBB, Brian J.

King of Cool. Will Smith

London: Plexus, 2000. 128p.,illus. (some col.).

Slim biography, but the third chapter does cover FRESH PRINCE albeit in fairly sketchy detail, and provides some insight into the show, which seems to have helped him on the road to acting fame, after earning and losing a fortune from music.

SMITH-SHOMADE, Beretta E.

Shaded Lives. African-American Women and Television

London: Rutgers University Press, 2002. 237p., illus., bibliog..

Judicious use of the index will provide some insight into both the FRESH PRINCE (from a feminist perspective) and also the COSBY SHOW if you are working on that one.

ZOOK, Kristal Brent

Color by Fox. The Fox Network and the revolution in Black Television

New York, Oxford: OUP, 1999. 148p., illus.

Chapter 1: Blood is Thicker than mud – C Note goes to Compton on the FRESH PRINCE. Looks at this "fish out of water" sitcom and the politics behind the show.

JOURNAL ARTICLE

VARIETY

10 September 1990, p59-60

[REVIEW], by Blue.

Preview of the series airing that day for the first time, placing it in context and making some minor comparisons/ comments concerning the COSBY SHOW.

PRESS ARTICLES

ROLLING STONE

20 September 1990, p45

Raps to Riches, by Jeffrey Ressler

As this then new programme aired, argues that this isn't

just a "version" of the BEVERLEY HILLBILLIES but a genuine attempt by the networks to reflect the tensions between older black people and the so-called B-boy generation.

VILLAGE VOICE

4 July 1996, p41

Part of a longer TV piece on other topics, this piece criticises the show quite extensively, arguing that it was part of the mid-80s black-pack cycle, with THE JEFFERSONS for example, but ultimately failed. Makes points about the way the programme used guest stars from earlier era shows, and the way it approached "issues".

FRIENDS

BOOKS

OWEN, Rob

Gen X TV. The Brady Bunch to Melrose Place

New York: Syracuse University Press, 1997. 225p., illus.

"Watching Us Watching Ourselves" (pp 111-117) looks at the story editors Adam Chase and Ira Ungerleider and gives some insight into both SEINFELD and FRIENDS. A further section (pp 148-152) discusses Friends "rip-offs" (or perhaps we should say sitcoms inspired by Friends) which may give some clues as to what works and what does not in sitcom land.

STALLINGS, Penny

The Ultimate Friends Companion. The one with the first five seasons.

London: Channel 4 Books, 1999. 192p., illus.(col.).

Glossy, but useful reminder of the early seasons of the programme plus an episode guide with profiles of each of the main actors and their characters.

WILD, David

Friends. The official companion.

London: Boxtree, 1995. 160p., illus (some col.).

Includes cast interviews and behind the scenes information, and an episode guide to the first season that gives fairly full synopses as well as the usual trivia quiz.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

TV GUIDE

Vol. 43, No.38, 23 September 1995, pp10-18, illus.

Making Friends, by Hilary De Vries

After one year on the US TV scene, FRIENDS is seen as the new trendsetter in network comedy. Its success is reflected on in terms of how the cast have been affected and what will happen in the new season.

EMMY

Vol. 17 No 6 December 1995, pp 24-27, illus.

Three for the Show, by Lisa Hallett

Discusses the series with the executive producers

Kevin Bright, Marta Kauffman and David Crane, and suggests that their rapport is what makes the show so successful.

SIGHT AND SOUND

Vol. 6 No. 10, October 1996, pp16-18

Friends of Yours, by Andy Medhurst

Discussion by comedy expert Medhurst on what FRIENDS might owe "THIRTYSOMETHING" and ponders whether it might be claimed to be the best comedy of the 1990s.

WRITTEN BY

Vol. 3 No 4, April 1999, pp26-31, illus.

A Conversation with...Marta Kauffman, by Susan Bullington Katz

An insight into Kauffman's perspective on the show, where she discusses how she moved on from writing musicals to writing for television.

EMMY

Vol. 25 No 6 Nov/Dec 2003, pp32 – 37, illus.

The One About the Finale of Friends, by Stephen Rebello

The executive producers and writers from the show reflect on ten successful shows. Features Ted Cohen, Andrew Reich, David Crane, Marta Kauffman, Kevin Bright, Scott Silveri and Shana Goldberg-Meehan.

On page 88 of the same issue is an insert of a complete script for episode 200 "The One With The Male nanny".

TV ZONE

No 173 March 2004, pp46-50, illus.

Still the Best of Friends, by David Richardson

Something of an overview as the final season is discussed by cast and crew.

TV GUIDE

Vol. 52 No 18 May 2nd 2004 pp. 26-30, illus.

The One Where They Say Goodbye, by Bruce Fretts

Sentimentalised marking of the end, with reference back to some of the traits FRIENDS watchers have. Two lightweight articles follow on, with quotes from celebrity guests who have appeared in the show, and (yes!) culinary treats to mark the show's passing (Famous Friends, by Craig Thomashoff, p33 and Friendly Gatherings by Donna Smith p34) before ...

Friday Morning and Beyond, by Bruce Fretts and Craig Thomashoff

Looks at the known or likely career paths of the stars of the show post-Friends

See also Entertainment Weekly article listed above under FRASIER.

PRESS ARTICLE

GUARDIAN

7 May 2004 p.3

And its Goodbye from Them.. by Dan Glaister and Gary Younge.

News story about broadcast of last FRIENDS episode in the US and how it maybe one of the last of a dying breed.

PHIL SILVERS SHOW (A.K.A. SERGEANT BILKO; A.K.A YOU'LL NEVER GET RICH)

BOOKS

MITZ, Rick

The Great TV Sitcom Book.

New York: Expanded ed., Perigree Press, 1988. 400p., illus.

Chronological listing of US sit-coms up to 1987, with cast lists. Very useful on background detail for BILKO, with quite a lot about the production operation too in a few pages. The format of the book means that for each year two or three top sitcoms are selected as "the best", whilst a few lesser titles get minimal coverage.

SILVERS, Phil with SAFFRON, Robert

The Man Who Was Bilko. The autobiography of Phil Silvers

London: W.H Allen, 1974. 276p., illus.

In chapters 12 and 13, Silvers discusses the BILKO shows (originally "You'll Never Get Rich") in the context of his life and career generally. He gives little insight into the character, but he talks about some of the guest stars and the sponsorship wrangles are also detailed and he describes some of his favourite elements of the shows..

THOMAS, David & **IRVINE**, Ian

Bilko. The Fort Baxter Story

London: Vermilion/Hutchinson, 1985. 111p., illus.

Why this book concentrates only on the BILKO character, and tells you nothing about Phil Silvers himself is something you might want to consider: at what point does a character become better known than the actor who plays it, and how might that affect the actor in question? Episode guide, and characters are all covered and there are extracts from episodes to illustrate the main characters or plots and their development. When the book was written it was over 30 years after the shows were first made, and the shows still air on UK and US television today. Longevity of comic characters and shows may be one yardstick by which to judge them.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

PRIMETIME

No. 6/7 October/December 1983, pp 2-3

Bilko: in France they'd build him a park, by Geoff Brown

Excellent background piece on this wonderful show, with some key episodes used to underpin specific points. There is a full episode guide on pp.4-9, compiled with

additional help from Tony Mechele and Christopher Wicking.

CULT TV
April 1998, pp.80-81

The Phil Silvers Show aka Bilko, by R[ob] F[raser]

Primarily a review, but important because it suggests what this show has influenced, including other titles we have included in this guide, and it is (relatively) recent in relation to the vintage (and I prefer "vintage" to "age") of the series.

PRESS ARTICLES

SUNDAY TIMES MAGAZINE
11 January 1983

Bilko's bite – as sharp as ever, by Brian Case

Brief piece serving as both tribute and background to the series.

OBSERVER
Life Magazine, 17 Mar 1996, pp20, 22, 24

All that glitters...., by [Robert Chalmers]

Based partly on an interview with Silvers' s daughter, Nancey, in the context of the tenth anniversary of his death, and in the light of the Steve Martin Bilko movie being made. Lots of background, lots of information about Silvers and about the show.

SEINFELD

BOOKS

BROOK, Vincent
Something Ain't Kosher Here. The Rise of the Jewish Sitcom.
London: Rutgers University Press, 2003. 226p., illus, tables, bibliog..

In the chapter "Transformation of Ethnic Space from the Goldbergs to Seinfeld" (pp 98-117) suggests that some of the issues in the programme are to do with the loss of identity of the Jewish people in modern New York. The following chapter " Under the Sign of Seinfeld: the second phase of the Jewish sitcom trend" suggests that the sitcom is significant within the new wave of sitcoms with Jewish characters, primarily for the way it is emulated or rejected as a model

GATTUSO, Greg.
Seinfeld Universe. The Entire Domain
London: BBC, 1998. 198p., illus.

Possibly the most accessible book written on the show. The almost scrapbook, fan-pleasing style of the book takes the reader through the key aspects of the show. It charts the history of the show, the development of the show's nothing concept, and looks at the locations used throughout the series. The four main characters – Jerry, George, Elaine and Kramer all come under individual scrutiny and there is some background information on who the characters were based on.

HIBBS, Thomas S.
Shows about nothing. Nihilism in Popular Culture from The Exorcist to Seinfeld.
Dallas, Texas: Spence Publishing, 1999.192p

The main thrust of this work is the development of anti-hero, nihilistic shows as reactions to the apathy and conformity of American life. Although the book is slightly heavy going at times it does make some useful comparisons between Seinfeld and other classic American sitcoms including – I LOVE LUCY, CHEERS and THE SIMPSONS. In particular, it focuses on the unlimited scope of Seinfeld's humour as a presupposition and a consequences of its nihilism.

In part 4 – Normal Nihilism – there are two relevant sections: Beyond the Dysfunctional Family: Seinfeld (pp 144-154), and Seinfeld's Dark God (pp 159-166) which look at how the show's humour almost obscures the inherent nihilism.

IRWIN, William, editor
Seinfeld and Philosophy. A Book About Everything and Nothing.
Chicago & La Salle: Open Court, 2000. 216p., episode guide.

The premise behind this book reads rather like an episode of Seinfeld. Thirteen Seinfeld fans who just happen to be professional philosophy experts examine the ideas, the stories and jokes behind the series. As a result the general theme of the book, suggesting that everything and nothing can sometimes not be terribly that far apart, follows over indulgent analysis into most aspects of the programme. The reader is treated to interpretations ranging from Pluto, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Aristotle. Sometimes more confusing than illuminating it is an interesting approach to the Seinfeld phenomena. The book also provides a useful complete episode listing.

MORREALE, January, editor.
Critiquing the sitcom. A Reader.
New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003. 357p., illus.

Chapter 15, Sitcoms say Goodbye. The cultural spectacle of Seinfeld's last episode, by January Morreale (pp274-285). Despite threatening to delve into text and subtexts (social, historical and industrial) of chosen sitcoms, the chapter on SEINFELD actually contextualises the appeal of the series quite well. The focus of attention turns to the TV event status that the last episode managed to achieve and is interesting in offering observations of how other programmes managed to refer to SEINFELD.

SEINFELD, Jerry, **LOUIS-DREYFUS**, Julia , **RICHARDS**, Michael **ALEXANDER**, Jason
Sein off: the final days of Seinfeld
Basingstoke; London : Boxtree, 1999. 175p.; illus

A visual documentary style publication of the making of the last episode of Seinfeld. It contains behind the scenes photos from the episode. It also has snippets of

script and some earnest and not so earnest observations from the four cast members. Not an essential reference work but it does provide the feeling of the cult status the show had achieved.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

TELEVISION QUARTERLY

Vol. 29. No.3. 1998 pp 52-54

The Seinfeld DOctoberrine –“No Hugging, No Learning – Imprints the 1990s, by Mary Ann Watson.

Poses the question: why has a show about nothing been so popular? The article suggests that in part it reflects contemporary (American?) mores of self-absorption and cynicism and invites the audience to identify with characters who lack moral discipline.

JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION

Vol.52. No.2.June 2002. pp.383-401.

Television news plugola and the last episode of Seinfeld by Matthew P. Mcallister

Analysis of news coverage of the final episode of SEINFELD, revealing that news organisations with a connection to the programme devoted more extensive coverage to the event than those without, and exploring the issue of 'plugola'. It makes a tabular comparison of news air time with the last episodes of M.A.S.H. and CHEERS.

JOURNAL OF POPULAR FILM & TELEVISION

Vol.28. No.3. Autumn 2000. pp.116-123

Seinfeld's humor noir: a look at our dark side by Irwin Hirsch and Cara Hirsch

The item touches on such topics as prolonged adolescence, changing gender roles, narcissism, and interdependency of the characters. It concludes that the viewer can relate to these slightly exaggerated social trends..

THIRD TEXT

No.51. Summer 2000. pp.75-84.article

Different yet even: the effacement of power in poststructuralism: the case of Seinfeld by Nitzan Ben-Shaul

An over verbose heavyweight analysis on some of the deeper tracts running through the Seinfeld series. The most illuminating perhaps explores the co-habitation between communality and self-interest.

CREATIVE SCREENWRITING.

Vol.2. No.3. Autumn 1995. pp.82-90.article

Plotting a TV show about nothing: patterns...Seinfeld by Greg M. Smith

An excellent analysis of the method and madness that form the basic structures of the SEINFELD series. The article states that it is one of the most densely plotted comedies on TV and goes on to observe particular traits such as multiple plotlines. These include some common

themes such as the whim/ramification plotline, and the personal antagonism plotline. Where SEINFELD differs from other shows is the plotlines are not "goal orientated". In this way, the Seinfeld team mines greater comic potential by seldom coming up with a denouement that the audience might guess, or when it does, reaching that denouement in an unexpected way.

HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

Vol.312. No.40. 31 May 1990. p.5

Review and credits for the premiere of the first season of the show by Richard Hack

PRESS ARTICLES

THE GUARDIAN: The Guide

24 June 1995, p4

Nothing and Something, by Jonathan Bernstein

A short article which has a half-Decemberent stab of identifying the appeal of SEINFELD. It has a few good storyline examples to give the reader a good taste of what the show was all about.

TIME OUT

7-14 February 1996, p169

Hidden Gems: the mystery of BBC2 sitcom schedules

An early report be-moaning the erratic scheduling by BBC2 which took SEINFELD from a prime-time slot into the twilight hour zone between 11.00pm and 12.00pm

THE GUARDIAN

17 January 1997, p13

Telling Seinfeld gag pays off, by Jonathan Coles.

Interesting article which supports SEINFELD on Sky TV and covers familiar ground in supporting the shows quirky characters and ground-breaking nature.

EVENING STANDARD

19 November 1997, p31

Now that's what I call comedy, by Victor Lewis-Smith

Of interest if only to see how, despite press articles like these, SEINFELD did not achieve a prominent slot on BBC2 and the peculiar nervousness of BBC executives to commit to the show.

DAILY TELEGRAPH

9 May 1998, p5

The sitcom finale that will close America down, by David Sapsted

DAILY TELEGRAPH

13 May 1998, p20

What's so funny, Seinfeld? By Robert Hanks

Two Daily Telegraph articles about SEINFELD which act as neat bookends looking towards the end of the series and both offering observations on the success of the

show in the States.

NEW STATESMAN

21 August 1998, p43

Laughter in the dark by Andrew Billen

Some useful quotes and examples which explain why SEINFELD was unique as a sitcom. Includes the interesting statistic that Seinfeld scripts usually ran to 70 pages against the sitcom average of 45.

THE GUARDIAN

10 October 2000, p17

King of New York by Martin Kelner

One of many articles moaning about how SEINFELD got moved about to late night slots in the BBC's terrestrial scheduling. Interesting as part of a debate into why Seinfeld was a big hit in the States but only received cult status in the UK.

WEBSITE

www.sonypictures.com/tv/shows/seinfeld

An entertaining rather than informative website. Well worth a browse, particularly for those not familiar with the series