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TV Heaven Plus: Soap Operas

Introduction to TV Heaven

The first viewing facility of its kind in Britain, TV Heaven invites National Media Museum visitors to select and watch any of the classic television programmes in the TV Heaven collection completely free of charge. Open to the public since June 1993, the TV Heaven archive has grown to include over 900 programmes, encompassing the last 60 years of television broadcasting history. These include classic comedies, childhood favourites, Soaps, hard-hitting documentaries, memorable plays and dramas, and much more.

TV Heaven Plus Showreels and Teachers' Packs

The aim of the TV Heaven Plus packs is to provide Media Studies groups with contextual information and a wide range of illustrative extracts from non-contemporary television programmes to aid their exploration of specific television genres.

TV Heaven Plus packs have two parts;

- 1.) A DVD of extracts available to view in the TV Heaven Viewing Room. The TV Heaven Plus: Soap Operas DVD includes extracts from 11 different continuing dramas spanning over 50 years of British television history.
- 2.) This accompanying teacher's pack, detailing the conventions of Soaps, the historical and social context of each featured programme, and a series of student worksheets to take away or complete on-site.

Both the DVD extracts and the supporting information are broadly arranged chronologically by date.

TV Heaven Plus visits are designed to be teacher-led, offering groups the independence and flexibility to tailor their visit to their own specific needs. The TV Heaven Plus DVD has the option to both 'play all' extracts, or alternatively you may select desired chapters.

The TV Heaven collection includes a large number of British Soaps and these form the basis of this TV Heaven Plus pack. Occasional reference is made to Soaps from other countries in terms of their relationship to the British model.

Should a member of your group wish to return to TV Heaven to watch any programme in full, they are welcome to do so. Visitors can call in to TV Heaven at any time, and our viewing spaces can be booked in advance by calling the TV Heaven desk directly on (01274) 203433. The full TV Heaven programme database can be viewed at <http://www.nationalmuseum.org.uk/Television/TvHeaven.asp>

At the end of a pack you will find an evaluation sheet. We would appreciate it if your group leader could complete this and hand it in at the TV Heaven desk before you leave.

Origins of British Soap Opera

Continuing dramas began on American radio in the 1930s. These serialised daytime dramas were sponsored by major detergent manufacturers and focused on dramatic (even melodramatic) fictional situations, and so quickly became better known as 'Soap Operas'.

The first British Soap was *Mrs Dale's Diary*, broadcast on the BBC Light radio programme (now Radio 2) in 1948. *The Archers* was launched alongside *Mrs Dale's Diary* in 1950 and is still running on BBC Radio 4. *The Archers* was originally produced with collaborative input from the Ministry of Agriculture as a way of getting information to farmers and smallholders to help increase productivity after the Second World War. But from the start *The Archers* was a modern Soap Opera; mixing family, community and domestic settings, characters and storylines. It was also hugely successful; at the height of its popularity it was estimated that 60% of British adults were regular listeners.

By the 1950s, Soaps had made the transition to television and began to spread across the world, growing in popularity. In 1960, *Coronation Street* began on Granada Television. It was originally meant to last for just six episodes, but, nearly 50 years later, it is still being broadcast, and is Britain's longest running Soap and one of the longest running television programmes in the world.

Although British Soap has a very distinctive character of its own, it should be noted that the genre's development has been strongly influenced by Soaps from other countries. For example, the successes of glossy, escapist American programmes like *Dallas* (Lorimar Television, 1978-1991) in 1980s Britain led to a rise in the overall popularity of the genre, prompting the creation of new British Soaps such as *Brookside* (Mersey Television, 1982-2003) and *EastEnders* (BBC, 1985-). Also, the success of Australian Soaps like *Neighbours* (Grundy Television Australia, 1985-) and *Home and Away* (7 Network, 1988-) with young viewers caused British Soaps to reconsider their target audience, and Soaps like *Hollyoaks* (Mersey Television, 1995-) were produced specifically to appeal to young people, with characters and storylines that they could relate to. This change in the target audience proved to be a wise decision and today British Soaps are more popular than ever.

Soap Opera Conventions

Structure and Format

The proper name for Soap Operas is 'continuing dramas'. They are called this because the episodes are not grouped into separate series, but run week-in, week-out, all year round.

Soap episodes are relatively short (most instalments run for just 30 minutes), but three or four episodes may be screened per week, often with an omnibus edition at the weekend. In recent Soaps, scenes also tend to be quite short; two minutes or so is considered the maximum viewing time for one scene to avoid the audience becoming bored.

A defining feature of the Soap Opera genre is that plots are open-ended, with several stories running at the same time. Three, four or even five storylines will be in progress during any one episode, with the action alternating between them. As one narrative is resolved, another completely different one with different characters will already be underway. One storyline may end, but there is no overall narrative closure because Soaps (unlike other television dramas) are designed to continue indefinitely. Because of this narrative approach, Soap Operas are sometimes described as being 'open text'.

A Soap episode will usually end with a 'cliff-hanger'; a suspenseful, un-concluded piece of dialogue or action, which will tempt viewers back for the next episode. Similarly episodes often begin with a 'hook' in which one or more of the narratives from a previous episode is continued.

Occasionally, Soaps will broadcast special episodes to coincide with real-world festivities or events such as Christmas (see the *Emmerdale* (Granada, 2006) extract, Chapter 6 on the accompanying DVD for an example). Other special episodes might focus on characters that have left the main show, or current characters in a location outside of their usual surroundings. Occasionally a special episode will be given over to an established, well-loved character, such as the 1987 episode of *EastEnders* which concentrated solely on Dot and Ethel reminiscing about their time in London during the Second World War (see DVD Chapter 8). These episodes are sometime referred to as 'Soap bubbles' because they are self-contained and have little impact on the storylines of the regular show.

Narrative Themes

Soaps concentrate on continuous narratives that deal with domestic themes and personal or family relationships. Births, marriages and deaths are frequently used to inject drama into a Soap and are a useful ways of introducing new characters and storylines, or getting rid of old ones. Illness and accidents also frequently appear in storylines, which has the interesting effect of making viewers aware of a variety of medical conditions.

Indeed, over the years, Soaps have shown an increasing interest in storylines built around social issues, such as illness, homelessness, crime, unemployment, racism, sexuality, drug abuse, domestic violence, and bullying. These storylines can have a strong impact on viewers, for example, when Britain was becoming aware of HIV and AIDS in the 1980s, *EastEnders* featured a story in which one of its central characters, Mark Fowler, contracted AIDS from his wife, helping to dispel social myths that only gay men were vulnerable to the virus.

Particularly controversial storylines are dramatic and entertaining and can also increase ratings, as they attract media interest and public debate, which helps to publicize the Soap. Of course, it must be remembered that what is considered to be controversial changes over time - what might have shocked viewers in the 1960s (such as unmarried mothers) is now considered too tame to be the focus of a major Soap storyline, and some of today's Soap concerns (such as homosexuality) would never even have been mentioned thirty years ago.

Socially relevant storylines help Soaps to remain realistic and maintain their popularity. Soap Operas try to be as relevant as possible to their audience, focusing on storylines and characters that viewers can relate to. However, like any television programme, Soaps have to be entertaining, which is why they tend to focus on the more dramatic aspects of ordinary life; death, birth, marriages, personal crises, and controversial social issues.

Characters

The link between Soap characters and storylines is pivotal to the success of the genre. Ultimately the characters serve two main purposes; they are a vehicle for the plot, and figures for the audience to relate to.

Characters are often introduced to a Soap with built-in storylines, such as serious illnesses or a secret in their past. This provides interest from the outset, however, writers must be careful not to link a character too closely to one particular narrative, otherwise they will outlive their usefulness once the storyline has been resolved and become boring. Also, many Soaps tend to base their characters on basic stereotypes which can support different sorts of storyline. For example 'the loveable rogue', 'the tart with a heart' and 'the gossip' can support stories with a comic element, whereas 'the gangster' and 'the bully' can contribute towards more dramatic storylines.

Most other television genres have central characters that provide the focus of the action, but Soaps have large casts which the action moves between. This helps to keep the storylines interesting over a long period of time and by focusing on just a few characters in each episode, the audience has time to get to know them and to become emotionally involved in their stories.

Soap characters often reflect the concerns of their target audience; for example, when Soaps began on 1930s radio they were aimed at American women who were at home while their husbands were at work. As a result, most of the drama revolved around female characters, who lead lives that listeners could relate and aspire to. Similarly, *Hollyoaks* is a modern Soap aimed at a young audience, and so the characters tend to be young and attractive, with concerns reflecting those of its viewers, such as university life, exam pressure, sex, jealousy and drug use.

Settings

British Soaps tend to have a strong regional identity, for example, *EastEnders* is set in the East End of London, while Manchester is the setting for *Coronation Street*. This helps to make each programme more realistic by placing it in an identifiable setting.

A Soap's setting also has an effect on its characters and narratives. For example, early episodes of *Emmerdale Farm* (Granada, 1972-) centred on the Sugden family's life living and working on a Yorkshire Dales farm, and so rural themes were central to the programme's storylines. Also, the extensive location filming was a significant factor in the early popularity of the programme, with the production crew making the most of the spectacular scenery.

British Soaps generally place a lot of importance on community (both in their set design and narrative themes) as they are often set around a small residential area, such as Albert Square in *EastEnders* or Brookside Close in *Brookside*. They also tend to include a central meeting point where all the characters interact and major storylines develop, for example The Rover's Return in *Coronation Street* or The Queen Vic in *EastEnders*. These contained sets have benefits from a production point of view because producers can save money by using the same set for many different character encounters.

Realism and ideology

Soap Operas are generally described as being 'more realistic' than crime and fantasy-based dramas. There is a longstanding tradition towards social realism in British Soap, that is, a 'warts and all' presentation of the world as people experience it, rather than an idealised version of reality. These Social realist Soaps explore lives and social issues that seem broadly 'realistic', even if the idea that all these issues could arise in one small place seems rather unlikely!

This tradition is less apparent in Soaps from other countries. For example, American Soaps like *Dallas* and *Dynasty* are very glamorous, presenting an idealised view of the world rather than a realistic one. Characters are immaculately presented, beautiful and successful - here, audiences watch to escape real life, not to see it presented on screen. Light entertainment Soaps, such as *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, seem to adopt the middle ground, being more realistic than many American Soaps, but presenting issues in a less confrontational, 'gritty' way than British Soaps.

Some Soaps use elements of more than one style. *Hollyoaks*, for example, sometimes appears to be social realist, but also adopts the light entertainment approach of *Neighbours*, which its younger audience finds more enjoyable.

Every element of a Soap contributes to its overall realism, including characters, storylines, setting, scripts and production elements such as music, lighting and camera work.

Sets, Music, Lighting and Camera Work

The sets, music, lighting and camerawork in British Soaps all serve to support the genre's broadly realist aims.

Sets tend to be based on buildings and outdoor spaces we use in everyday life, including parks, streets, houses, shops, pubs and offices. These are usually built especially for filming, but are made to look like real buildings as far as possible. When Phil Redmond created *Brookside*, he actually bought a real cul-de-sac street to film in and work from, which helped to make the programme feel very realistic.

Other than the theme tune, music is rarely used in British Soaps, unless it comes from the action itself. For example, a character might hum a tune as they're working or have the radio on in the background of a scene.

Camera work is also simple, generally avoiding tricks of any kind. 'Point of view' or 'high angle' shots are rarely used in Soaps, instead the camera shows the action very much as a casual observer would see it if they were watching from nearby. Similarly, lighting is used fairly simply; special effects are not used, rather lighting replicates sunlight or the lamps in someone's home.

All of these things help to create a fictional world that mirrors the real world that viewers recognise.

Soap Opera Audiences

Soap Operas were originally developed with a female audience in mind, and the characters and storylines of modern Soaps are similarly aimed at this audience. Consequently, Soap Opera narratives are mostly built around domestic concerns (mainly home, family and relationships) and show how 'ordinary people' might cope with the ongoing struggles of day to day life. Similarly, Soap Operas frequently feature strong female characters of all ages and appearances that viewers can identify with.

While women still form the largest Soap audience, it is also worth noting how many teenagers (of both genders, but especially girls) are Soap fans. Indeed, certain mainstream Soaps (*Neighbours*, *Hollyoaks*) have been structured specifically for a teen audience, with many settings (such as schools, cafés and bedrooms) familiar to that age group and many storylines catered to their concerns.

It should also be noted that many Soap fans will regularly watch more than one Soap, which is aided by the fact that Soaps are rarely scheduled against each other (see Soap Opera Institutions; Scheduling for further details).

Soap Pleasures

There are many reasons why audiences might enjoy watching Soaps.

Some people watch Soaps because they offer a more dramatic representation of their own lives and concerns; others because it pleases them to see and hear other people's problems, which distracts them from their own. Some viewers simply enjoy looking into other people's lives. Since Soap Operas are fictional (and so have no real 'victims') we can be nosy without feeling guilty.

Viewers enjoy learning about the complex relationships between different characters and watching them develop over time. Soaps also present narrative puzzles - opportunities to guess what is going to happen next, based on prior knowledge of the characters and their fictional histories. Over time, regular viewers become semi-experts on their favourite Soaps, and their detailed knowledge gives them further pleasure.

The pleasure for a Soap fan does not stop at watching the programme. Further enjoyment can be gained in talking about the programme with other fans, reading the huge number of magazines and books devoted to the subject, and collecting items of Soap memorabilia. As a result a profitable industry has grown up around Soap Operas.

It is interesting to note that the type of pleasure gained from Soaps seems to vary from country to country. We have seen how British Soaps tend to feature 'realistic', ordinary characters and storylines, which contrasts to American Soaps (such as *Dallas*) which tend to focus on characters that are beautiful, rich and successful. Enjoyment of British Soaps seems come from the audiences' ability to identify and sympathise with the characters, whereas American Soaps offer audiences escapism and fantasy.

Media and publicity

Often, the controversial nature of some Soap storylines attracts media attention. For example, when *EastEnders* announced in May 2009 that they intended to show a gay kiss between an openly gay character and the son of a new Muslim family, newspapers were quick to report on it.

But is not just controversy that makes the news; the media will also feature stories about life behind the scenes of a Soap, such as when an actor announces that they are leaving the show, or when the programme wins an award of some kind.

In each case, the media is capitalising on the fact that Soaps have a loyal fan base to increase television ratings and sell newspapers. But the programme itself can also benefit from the publicity, with existing and new audiences tuning in to see what all the fuss is about.

Soaps can also use the media to their advantage when writing new storylines. If a particular issue is being widely reported in the media then Soaps might use that as the foundation for a new narrative, ensuring that the programme remains topical and relevant.

Soap Opera Institutions

Public Service / Commercial Broadcasters

Soaps hold different benefits for public service and commercial broadcasters.

Because BBC programmes are paid for by a license fee, the BBC has to balance the need to be different from other broadcasters (offering programmes the commercial sector will not) and be popular (because everyone has to pay towards the BBC's costs). The BBC also aims to blend entertainment with education, and this can be seen in Soaps like *EastEnders* which portray a range of social issues as accurately and realistically as possible. An early (and quite obvious) example of the BBC's 'public service' attitude can be seen in *The Grove Family* (BBC, 1954-1957) extract (Chapter 1 of the accompanying DVD).

Commercial broadcasters such as ITV, Channel 4, and Channel 5 operate differently from the BBC, selling advertising time in-between their programmes to fund programme production. The more popular the programme, the more the broadcaster can charge for airtime, because advertisers want their products to be seen by as many people as possible. Soaps are one of the most consistently popular television genres, and so advertising slots in Soaps are expensive to purchase.

Similarly, commercial broadcasters can negotiate sponsorship deals, linking their programmes with a particular product in return for large sums of money. For example Cadburys sponsored *Coronation Street* for a number of years. Commercial broadcasters are therefore under pressure to keep their Soaps entertaining enough to hold viewers' interest and so continue to attract advertising revenue.

Scheduling

Like any other programme, Soap Operas are scheduled at a time when their target audience are likely to be watching, whether that is during the day (to attract a non-working female audience) or after school (to attract a teenage audience).

Channels maintain an unspoken agreement that they will not schedule their Soaps at the same time, because many Soap fans watch more than one Soap and so a planned 'ratings war' would not help either broadcaster.

Careful scheduling of Soap Operas has added financial benefits for commercial television companies. Because advertisers sell their products to a particular type of customer, they will buy advertising time when that particular audience are likely to be watching. This gives us another clue about the sort of audience that may be watching a particular Soap; if an advert during that Soap is promoting beauty products, it is likely that the programme attracts a mainly older female audience, and if CDs and magazines are being advertised, it is likely that the programme is aimed at a younger audience.

Production

From the point of view of broadcasters, Soaps are very useful because they are relatively cheap to produce, yet can generate large audiences. They are relatively cheap to make because the same sets, costumes and props can be used again and again, and very little location filming is needed. They are also quick to produce - they tend to focus on dialogue (which is cheap and quick to film), rather than action (which is time-consuming and expensive to set up), and each minute of recording tends to take about an hour to film. This may sound like a lot, but on large film sets it can often take days to successfully direct a few seconds of action. Also, Soaps can run for years without coming to an end and so producers can make the most out of the money they invest. For example, *Coronation Street* is one of the longest running television programmes in the world, celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2010.

Not all Soap Operas are successful however, there are some which do not catch the interest of viewers and end up being cancelled quite quickly. *Albion Market* (Granada) began in 1985 as a companion Soap to *Coronation Street* and a rival to the BBC's new Soap, *EastEnders*, but was cancelled just a year later after only 100 episodes.

Merchandising

Often, a Soap's popularity allows for the sale of related merchandise. This can range from books and calendars, to tea towels, CDs and even perfume. The type of merchandise is generally tailored to the target audience of that Soap, for example, since 2001, the current cast of *Hollyoaks* (a Soap very much aimed at a young audience) has produced two annual calendars; 'Hollyoaks Babes', featuring the female cast, and 'Hollyoaks Hunks', featuring the male cast. It was also announced in 2008 that the Soap was to launch its own 'his' and 'her' fragrance.

Soap Opera Representations

Because Soaps have such large casts they are able to represent many different social groups - different age groups, classes, genders, sexual preferences, races and religious beliefs.

Over the years, British society has changed to encompass many more social groups and lifestyles. Because Soaps aim to be as realistic as possible and represent the different audiences that may be watching, they have to ensure that their characters are similarly diverse.

There is also a tradition in British Soap in particular for strong female characters. Women are still the largest audience for Soap Operas, and so female characters are often the best developed, offering characterisation and storylines that the audience can relate to and sympathise with.

Soap storylines tend to focus on socially relevant issues, and characters will often be introduced or developed to represent and support these. For example, *Brookside* is often credited as being the first Soap to offer realistic and in-depth representations of male characters, which were used to great effect in their topical 1980s storylines around unemployment.

There is also a strong sense of community in British Soaps. Most Soaps tend to focus on small, contained residential areas (like Albert Square, or Brookside Close), where the characters interact closely and the majority of the action takes place. In recent years some Soaps have been criticised for this 'unrealistic' representation of community life, as many people today have very little contact with their neighbours.

Soaps have also been criticised for their use of character stereotypes over the years. 'The loveable rogue', 'the tart with a heart', 'the put-upon wife', and 'the stropky teenager', have been seen in most British Soap Operas, but how accurately do they represent the complexity of their audiences' own lives and personalities?

Key Questions

While viewing each of the following extracts, it will be useful to keep in mind;

- What Soap Opera **conventions** can be identified?
- How are different social groups **represented**?
- What sort of **audience** is the Soap Opera aimed at?
- What **institutional** issues are relevant?

There are also a number of extract-specific questions listed alongside each programme description.

TV Heaven Plus: Soap Operas

DVD Chapters

1. *The Grove Family* (BBC, 1956)
2. *Emergency Ward Ten* (BBC, 1964)
3. *Coronation Street* (Granada, 1960 / 1990)
4. *Compact* (BBC, 1964)
5. *Crossroads* (ATV, 1978)
6. *Emmerdale Farm* (Granada, 1972) / *Emmerdale* (Granada, 2006)
7. *Brookside* (Channel 4, 1982 / 1995)
8. *EastEnders* (BBC, 1987 / 1987)
9. *Albion Market* (Granada, 1985)
10. *Eldorado* (BBC, 1993)
11. *Hollyoaks* (Channel 4, 1995)

Chapter 1. *The Grove Family* (BBC, 1956)

Extract Duration: 2 minutes, 45 seconds

Writer(s): Michael Pertwee, Roland Pertwee

Producer: Freda Lingstrom

Cast: Edward Evans, Peter Bryant, Christopher Beeny, John Stuart



Programme context:

Devised by BBC producer John Warrington and written by father and son team Roland and Michael Pertwee, *The Grove Family* (BBC, 1954-1957) was Britain's first Soap Opera for adults. Named after the BBC's Lime Grove Studios (where the Soap was made), the Groves were a lower middle-class family living in a neat double-fronted house, in a quiet London road. Compared to modern Soaps, *The Grove Family* had a very small central cast; apart from mum and dad Grove there was a ninety year-old grandmother, two elder children, and two youngsters.

Each episode lasted between fifteen and twenty minutes and the stories and themes seem very tame by today's Soap Opera standards, concentrating on petty squabbles and everyday domestic incidents. Typical of the BBC's 'public service' approach, each episode aimed to teach the audience something useful, for example, pointing out the virtues of buying a television licence or making one's house burglar-proof. Yet the show was popular and in the first year, almost a quarter of the British people who owned a television set regularly watched *The Grove Family*.

In a 1954 interview for *TV Mirror*, writer Michael Pertwee explained how the format for the series came about:

"We decided from the first to make a separate self-contained incident each week, so that anyone could switch on at any episode and understand what it was all about."

This is somewhat different from today's Soap Opera model, in which a large number of characters present several stories in each episode, but the idea of viewers being able to pick stories up after having missed episodes is still maintained today. The Pertwees' approach to realistic characterisation is also still very relevant;

"We decided that if the family was to have some semblance of reality, not every member should have wings sprouting from their shoulders. Thus, the elder son Jack is bit of a smart alick. The elder daughter Pat has a number of boyfriends whom she does not treat very well and grandma is best described as 'crotchety'."

After three years of writing continuously for the series the Pertwees asked the BBC for a holiday and *The Grove Family* was taken off the air. As was commonplace with British television at the time, the series was broadcast live, and so very few episodes survive in the BBC archives. A spin-off movie, *It's A Great Day* was made in 1955, and as part of the BBC's Lime Grove celebrations in 1991 a new edition of the programme was made, featuring a number of modern day Soap stars, including *Brookside's* (Mersey Television, 1982-2003) Sue Johnston and *EastEnders'* (BBC, 1985-) Leslie Grantham.

The Grove Family, more naïve than dramatic, nevertheless enjoyed enormous popularity in its time and was arguably the birth of the Soap Opera formula that eventually came to dominate British television, with its focus on realistic narrative themes and characters that its audience could identify with.

While watching the extract:

- How does the storyline here fit in with the BBC's 'public service' agenda? How do you think this affects the realism of the programme?
- What conventions of the Soap Opera genre can you identify here and which seem to be missing? Think particularly about setting, characters, realism, storylines and narrative themes.

Chapter 2. *Emergency-Ward 10* (BBC, 1964)

Extract Duration: 4 minutes, 10 seconds

Writer(s): Tessa Diamond (creator), Basil Dawson

Producer: Cecil Petty

Cast: Paula Byrne, Tom Adams, Geoffrey Colville, Joan Hooley, Anthony Collin, Chips Rafferty, Pamela Duncan



Programme context:

Emergency-Ward 10 (ATV, 1957-1965) was the UK's first twice-weekly Soap Opera (airing on Tuesday's and Friday's) and the country's first medical Soap. The programme began life as a six-week filler called *Calling Nurse Roberts*, but, after attracting a large audience of one million viewers for the first episode, the series went on to become one of the best-loved continuing dramas of its time, attracting an average audience of 16 million people per week, and 24 million at its peak. The programme notched up 966 thirty-minute episodes and fifty one-hour instalments during its ten years on air, defining the Soap genre in the process.

Set in the fictitious Oxbridge General Hospital, the programme focused equally on the lives and loves of its medical staff and the pressure of their work. This simple premise provided the show with a twin approach to storytelling that modern medical series such as *Casualty* (BBC, 1986-), *Doctors* (BBC, 2000-) and *Holby City* (BBC, 1999-) still mimic; following the heroics of doctors and nurses as they battle for their patients' lives while trying to maintain a normal life away from their jobs. There has however been one significant change in modern medical dramas; in *Emergency Ward 10*, patient deaths were strictly limited to five per year and, given the time it was made, there was none of the graphic depictions of blood and guts that audiences expect from medical dramas today.

Although sedate by today's standard the series did set a landmark in 1964 with its then controversial portrayal of an interracial relationship between surgeon Louise Mahler (Joan Hooley) and Doctor Giles Farmer (John White), which included the first ever on-screen interracial kiss. Even so, this scene was toned down before transmission because it was considered "a little too suggestive".

The series had a powerful social impact, winning praise from the British Medical Association for calming people's fear of hospitals. In 1962 the then Minister of Health, Enoch Powell, congratulated the show on its 500th episode and commented on the useful job it did in reminding the public of the need for immunization. However, despite the show's general observance of real medical procedure, it sometimes cast it aside in the pursuit of a storyline.

In 1958, the BBC tried to emulate the success of *Emergency-Ward 10* with the company's first attempt at a bi-weekly Soap, *Starr and Company* (BBC, 1958). The series went out on Mondays and Thursdays at 7:30pm (to avoid clashing with *Emergency-Ward 10*), but vanished after 77 episodes. It seems that the BBC were not yet comfortable with the weekly domestic drama format and it wasn't until 1962 when they were trying to rival the success of ITV's *Coronation Street* (Granada, 1960-) that they decided to give the genre another try with *Compact* (BBC, 1962-1965).

In 1967, with ratings beginning to fall, ATV Head Lew Grade cancelled *Emergency-Ward 10*, later admitting it was "one of the two biggest mistakes of my life" and in 1972 he tried to revive the series as *General Hospital* (ATV, 1972-1979), although this failed to rival the success of the original programme.

While watching the extract:

- From this extract, do you think that *Emergency-Ward 10* was successful in its 'twin narrative' approach?
- How does *Emergency-Ward 10* compare to other medical dramas you may have seen, such as *Casualty*, *Doctors*, or *Holby City*?

Chapter 3. *Coronation Street* (Granada, 1960) / (Granada, 1990)

Extract Duration: 3 minutes, 45 seconds / 6 minutes, 20 seconds

Writer(s): Tony Warren / Adele Rose

Director: Eric Price / Oliver Horsbrugh

Cast: Christine Hargreaves, Jennifer Moss, Daphne Oxenford, Joan Heath / Eileen Derbyshire, Brian Mosley, Jill Summers, Geoff Hinsliff, Charles Lawson, Lynne Perrie, Ray Barraclough, Julie Goodyear, Michelle Holmes, Bill Waddington, Thelma Barlow, Peter Baldwin, Betty Driver, Anne Kirkbridge



Programme context:

Coronation Street (Granada, 1960-) was first broadcast live at 7.00pm on 9th December 1960. Although it was originally intended to last for just twelve episodes, fifty years later, and with an average viewing audience of 10 million people, "Corrie" is now the longest running Soap Opera in the world.

Focusing on day-to-day community life in the fictional Manchester suburb of Weatherfield, the series was created by Tony Warren as a gritty, down-to-earth drama that realistically reflected the lives of real working class Northerners. *Coronation Street's* ambitions for regionalism and realism were groundbreaking. Prior to 1960, television had been dominated by actors speaking in clipped 'Queen's English' that bore no resemblance to the voices or lives of the majority of its audience, but *Coronation Street* would help to change that.

The action centres on a row of terraced houses, a local pub (The Rovers Return) and a corner shop which are meant to represent a 'typical' northern back street. In its early days, *Coronation Street*, like most television drama of the time, was performed and broadcast live, just like a stage play, which added to the naturalistic feel of the programme. For added realism Warren even went as far as visiting local graveyards to find the names for his new characters on the headstones! However, *Coronation Street's* realist ambitions were greeted unfavourably by some critics to begin with. For example, Ken Irwin wrote in *The Daily Mirror* that "the programme is doomed" thanks to its "grim scenes of a row of terraced houses and smoking chimneys." And yet the programme was an instant hit with the viewing public and began to be transmitted twice weekly every Wednesday and Friday (switching to Mondays and Wednesdays in 1961).

Two of the key factors behind *Coronation Street's* continued success are the consistent quality of the scripts - over the years the show has attracted some notable television writers including Vince Powell, Harry Driver, John Finch, Jack Rosenthal and Geoffrey Lancashire - and the attention the writers pay to characterisation.

The inhabitants of Warren's fictional street were drawn from real life and his memories of growing up in the north of England, but each character was skilfully designed to appeal to a wide section of the audience. Characters included; social-climbing publican Annie Walker (played by Doris Speed) and her put-upon husband, Jack (Arthur Leslie); timid shopkeeper Florrie Lindlay (Bettie Alberge); miserable pensioner Albert Tatlock (Jack Howarth); the twenty-something David Barlow (Alan Rothwell) and his idealistic university graduate brother, Ken (William Roach) – the only surviving member of the original cast.

One of *Coronation Street's* particular strengths has been its tradition of strong female characters, including battle-axe Ena Sharples, landlady Annie Walker and 'Street sirens' Elsie Tanner, and later, Bet Lynch, something which has guaranteed its popularity among female viewers.

Another reason for *Coronation Street's* longevity is the way the programme recycles basic character types, restyling and reinventing them to create fresh personalities while meeting plot requirements and the general structure of the programme. 'Battle Axes', 'Bad Seeds', 'Downtrodden husbands', 'Sirens', and

'Villains' occur again and again, not only in *Coronation Street*, but in most other Soap Operas, to help deliver dramatic, comic or emotional storylines.

Tony Warren may have created the foundations of *Coronation Street*, but when Tim Aspinall became producer of the show in 1964, he made changes that had a profound effect on the programme and the genre in general. Aspinall decided to write out a number of "unwanted" characters and to the horror of his production team announced that Martha Longhurst (played by Lynne Carol), the much-loved gossip of *Coronation Street*, would suffer a fatal heart attack in *The Rover's Return*. When the episode was broadcast, shocked viewers watched as Martha became the first character to have lived and died on a Soap. Many fans reacted as if the actress herself had died, mourning for the character and sending flowers to the Granada office – showing just how emotionally involved people had become in the programme and its characters. Tim Aspinall's time as producer lasted only a few months, but Martha's dramatic exit established the template for many more shocking Soap deaths. Also, it has since become common for new Soap producers to follow Aspinall's example and put their own stamp on a show by culling as many characters as possible.

Coronation Street continued to be hugely popular during the 1960s and by June 1970 the show was being sold abroad, to countries like Sierra Leone, Hong Kong, Holland and Greece. Colour came to *Coronation Street* in mid-1972, and sets were expanded to allow viewers to see the houses' roofs and back gardens.

Over the years, the series has mellowed in its previously grim and gritty outlook on British life and introduced an element of comedy into the scripts; at one point to such an extent that creator Tony Warren disowned it. In 1976 Bill Podmore, *Coronation Street* longest serving producer, joined the team, and his production background in television comedies ensured that humour became an even stronger ingredient of the show.

Since 1989 *Coronation Street* has gone out three times a week, and although it has retained its underlying sense of humour it has changed in an effort to keep up with the sensational elements in newer Soaps such as *EastEnders* (BBC, 1985-) and *Brookside* (Mersey Television, 1982-2003), opting for storylines that have included drug abuse, kidnapping, sexual assault, murder and teen pregnancy.

By growing and adapting to reflect the changes in society and television drama *Coronation Street* has lasted nearly fifty years, and has become a national institution. Many other Soaps have aimed to challenge its dominance over the years, but none have managed to outlast it. Even during the growing popularity of the daytime Soap *Crossroads* (ITV, 1964-1988, 2001-2003), *Coronation Street* retained its primetime slot in the schedules and even managed to increase its ratings.

Novelist John Braine, writing in *TV Times* in 1970, suggested that the show's consistency and setting was the key to its longevity, saying "the most important character in the Street is the Street itself. No matter who comes and goes, the Street remains". Despite characters, producers, writers and British society itself changing over the years, "Corrie" has attempted to keep true to its original aims; to present the lives of typical Northerners as realistically - yet dramatically - as possible.

While watching the first extract:

- What evidence can you see here of *Coronation Street's* aims to be regional and realistic?
- How is *Coronation Street's* target audience catered for here? Think particularly about characters, the setting and narrative themes.

While watching the second extract:

- How do you think the characters and storylines have changed between these two extracts?
- What character 'types' can you identify here?
- What evidence can you see here of *Coronation Street's* traditions for strong female characters, a close sense of community and its later tendency to use comedy?

Chapter 4. *Compact* (BBC, 1964)

Extract Duration: 4 minutes, 15 seconds

Writer(s): Hazel Adair, Peter Ling

Director: James Cellan-Jones

Cast: Ronald Allen, Richard Beale, Christine Pollon, Bill Kerr, Robert Desmond, Lawrence James, Vincent Ball, Sandra Payne

Programme context:

Compact (BBC, 1962-1965) was the BBC's third adult Soap Opera

following *The Grove Family* (1954-1957) and *Starr and Company* (BBC, 1958). Unlike *The Grove Family*, which had been focused on a single family, *Compact* told the everyday story of a glossy women's magazine and its staff. The stories revolved round the strain of getting each issue on to the presses while exploring the personal relationships of the staff and their position within the company.

The programme was devised by *Hazel Adair* and *Peter Ling*, who later created *Crossroads* (ITV, 1964-1988, 2001-2003), and was screened on a Tuesday and Thursday night so as not to clash directly with its ITV competitor, *Coronation Street* (ITV, 1960-), which had already established itself as the dominant force in the early evening television schedules.

Script-writer Hazel Adair had previously worked for a well-known woman's magazine and believed that it would provide the right setting for a television series, with its world of different personalities, situations, intrigues and romances. She also believed that the authenticity of an office background would seem more realistic and relevant to many viewers. Aside from focusing on the high-pressure business of putting together a successful magazine, *Compact* included storylines about giving up smoking, a post room junior selling cannabis and a large number of office romances. These included senior executive Ian Harmon (played by Ronald Allen, who later appeared in *Crossroads*) falling for secretary Sally (Monica Evans), but compared to today's Soaps the romance was handled modestly and the characters were soon married.

Compact is interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, it accepted that people who work together often lead quite separate lives away from the office and that people in the same environment don't all interact – which is very different from the general Soap convention that everyone knows everyone else's business and interacts within a tight-knit community. Secondly, it was the first Soap Opera to include a regular role for a black actor, Horace James, who played magazine photographer Jeff Armandez for twenty-six episodes in 1964.

Responses to the programme were mixed, with critics mainly siding against it. However, viewers thought differently, and from 1964 there was a regular Sunday omnibus edition to meet the demands of people who missed the twice-weekly instalments. At the same time, *Compact* started to explore a number of more 'daring' storylines such as infidelity and suicide, but it seems that the BBC were uncomfortable with such racy subjects and at the height of its success, and after three years and 373 episodes, *Compact* was cancelled.

Some people who worked on *Compact* went on to develop other Soap Operas; Hazel Adair and Peter Ling went on to create *Crossroads* for ATV in 1964 and Julia Smith, who would later co-create *EastEnders* (BBC, 1985-) and *Eldorado* (BBC, 1992-1993) with Tony Holland, had her first taste of Soap as a director on *Compact*.

While watching the extract:

- How does *Compact* balance personal storylines with a workplace setting?
- The makers of *Compact* hoped the office setting would add realism to the programme. Do you think they were successful?



Chapter 5. *Crossroads* (ATV, 1978)

Extract Duration: 4 minutes, 30 seconds

Writer(s): Michaela Crees, David Garfield, Raymond Bowers, Peter Ling

Director: John Scholtz-Conway

Cast: Noele Ronald Allen, Michael Turner, Susan Hanson, Claire Faulconbridge, Sandor Eles

Programme context:

Set in a fictional Midlands hotel, *Crossroads* (ITV, 1964-1988, 2001-2003) began in 1964. Originally broadcast on the commercial ITV network between 1964 and 1988, it was produced by ATV until the end of 1981 and then by Central Television.



To begin with, *Crossroads* was shown five days a week. Although popular, the show became infamous (perhaps a little unfairly) for its poor production values, and the Independent Television Authority decided in 1967 that the series should be reduced to four episodes a week to prevent storylines being watered-down and to improve the overall quality.

Despite its reputation for low production values and far-fetched scripts, *Crossroads* maintained high ratings and a loyal audience throughout its original run. However, a number of regional independent television companies dropped the series because of its reputation, including, in 1968, the newly-formed Thames Television franchise for the London area. However, Thames' decision proved unpopular with viewers and six months later the company began showing it again, although this meant that viewers in the Thames region were behind the rest of the country for several years.

Over time the series dealt with storylines that were controversial and ground-breaking for their time; Sandy Richardson was injured in a car accident and left confined to a wheelchair, and so became the first regular paraplegic character in British Soap Opera; a test tube baby was born to Glenda and Kevin Banks (played by Lynette McMorrough and David Moran); and the series saw the first regular black characters in British Soap since Horace James in *Compact* (BBC, 1962-1965), when Melanie Harper (played by Cleo Sylvestre) arrived at the motel in 1970 as Meg's adopted daughter (itself a taboo issue). Cleo was given the role by producer Reg Watson following press coverage of racial tensions in the Birmingham area at that time - since *Crossroads* was set in the Midlands, this story allowed the Soap to capitalise on a socially relevant topic.

In 1970, the series gained a film unit, giving it the freedom to do more outside location shooting. When ATV was reformed into Central Independent Television at the end of 1981 the company continued to produce the programme, but made several changes; in March 1985, new filming locations, sets, and characters were introduced and many storylines revolved around the new motel owner, Nicola Freeman (Gabrielle Drake), while other long-term characters were axed. The theme tune was also updated, and the opening titles replaced with a longer version. Finally, the show was renamed *Crossroads Motel*.

These were just the first of many changes the programme underwent over the following years. In 1986, a new producer, William Smethurst, was ordered to turn *Crossroads* into a wittier, more upmarket programme and improve the production values of the show. Smethurst shifted the narrative centre from the motel to the nearby village of King's Oak and more long-running characters were dropped. As with earlier changes this proved unpopular with fans, however the last eighteen months of the show saw vast improvements in production values, greater outside location work, better direction, funnier scripts and better characterisation.

Yet more changes were planned, but in June 1987 the decision was made to axe the series entirely and the last episode was broadcast on 4th April 1988. The series was revived in 2001 by Carlton Central

Television, and further changes were made to characters and stories, but the lack of continuity with past storylines alienated many fans. Changes to the scripts also proved unpopular with some of the cast; actress Kathy Staff left the programme because of the amount of sex the show now contained, telling ITV Teletext she felt it was no longer the family-friendly show she was originally part of. But the series did manage to average between 3 and 4 million viewers, becoming one of ITV's highest rated daytime shows at that time.

In July and August 2002, *Crossroads* was reaching 3.3 million viewers, beating BBC1 Soap *Neighbours* (Grundy Television Australia, 1985-) which was shown in the same time slot. But following a brief period off air in September that year (for yet another revamp) viewers had fallen to 2 million and the show was axed again in May 2003. The storyline of the final episode was the revelation that the glamorous hotel had in fact been a dream of one of the characters – clearly *Crossroad* had abandoned any attempt to stick to the realist aims of most British Soaps.

Until the mid-1980s the show would always end with a brief post-credits scene in which a character would speak a single line of dramatic dialogue, before the final bar of theme tune played over the closing ATV/Central logo. This 'hook' technique has since been mimicked by other Soaps, notably *Hollyoaks* (Mersey Television, 1995-).

Very few archive recordings of *Crossroads* exist before 1981 because ATV wiped and re-used most of the videotapes and no episodes survive before April 1965. However, various DVD volumes of episodes have been released over recent years.

While watching the extract:

- Based on this extract, do you think *Crossroads* deserved its reputation for low production values and far-fetched scripts?
- How does *Crossroads* create personal drama in a workplace setting?

Chapter 6. *Emmerdale Farm* (Granada, 1972) / *Emmerdale* (Granada, 2006)

Extract Duration: 2 minutes, 50 seconds / 4 minutes, 45 seconds

Writer(s): Kevin Laffan / Sarah Bagshaw

Director: Tristan de Vere Cole / Mickey Jones

Cast: Shiela Mercier, Andrew Burt, Jo Kendall, Frazer Hines, Frederick Pyne, Toke Townley, Gail Harrison, Ronald McGill / Ken Farrington, Richard Cole, Mathew Bose, Verity Rushworth, Jenna-Louise Coleman, Mark Charnock, Meg Johnson, Sammy Winward, Kelvin Fletcher, Roxanne Pallett, Tom Lister, Nick Miles, Matt Healy, Adele Silva, Ben Freeman, Deena Payne, Tony Audenshaw, Alex Carter



Programme context:

Emmerdale Farm began in 1972, not as a Soap, but as a lunchtime drama series that was expected to run for just twenty six weeks. It became the most successful of a large number of programmes that emerged after the government lifted restrictions on the hours of broadcasting, making daytime television possible.

Early episodes centred on the Sugden family and their life living and working on *Emmerdale Farm*, and extensive location filming in the Yorkshire Dales was a significant factor in the early popularity of the show, with the production crew making the most of the spectacular scenery.

The Soap's setting and themes were inseparable, and early episodes established rural narratives that would continue for many years, such as the changing nature of farming and the impact of the modern world on the rural way of life. And yet, *Emmerdale Farm* did not shy away from traditional Soap Opera elements such as murder, adultery and sudden tragedy. It was an irresistible combination, and by the end of the 1970s, *Emmerdale Farm* moved from the daytime schedules to a peak-time evening viewing slot in many regions. It was still not technically a continuous Soap because there were breaks during separate series, but these breaks became shorter as viewing figures steadily increased.

Writers made a virtue of strong storylines based around the Sugden family; additional characters were brought in for short periods rather than as permanent additions to the cast and so the regular characters were given a chance to develop, and viewers grew to love them. However, such a small cast could not sustain the series for long and towards the end of the 1970s some new regular characters were introduced. More young characters were brought in too, and with them the storylines became somewhat racier, culminating in the relatively graphic portrayal of Jack Sugden's adulterous affair with Karen Moore, which had some serious off-screen consequences; after thirteen years on the show, creator Kevin Laffan had a very public falling out with the producers over this new content and ultimately left the series. But despite his concerns, by the mid-1980s *Emmerdale Farm* was delivering consistently high ratings.

It was still not fully networked across all the ITV regions, but when the BBC's new Soap *EastEnders* (1985-) moved from its original 7pm slot because of the strong competition from *Emmerdale Farm* (which was broadcast at the same time), ITV controllers began to take more notice of their Soap's potential. As a result *Emmerdale Farm* underwent a number of significant changes; it finally became a continuous Soap, and in 1988 became a fully networked programme.

These off-screen developments were mirrored by a number of cast changes, and viewers saw the dramatic departures of old favourites and the introduction of the Tates – a family that would go on to provide some of the most dramatic storylines in the Soap's history. Finally, in order to rid the programme of its original agricultural associations the series was renamed *Emmerdale* in 1989. Since then the Soap has firmly adhered to the template of British Television Soaps, with its large cast, melodramatic storylines and loyal fan base.

While watching the first extract:

- How does the Yorkshire Dales setting of *Emmerdale Farm* influence the themes, characters, and storylines that you can see here?
- What do you think of the representations of class, gender in this extract?

While watching the second extract:

- What differences do you notice in the length and content of these scenes compared to the previous *Emmerdale Farm* extract?
- This is the opening of a special Christmas episode - what festive references do you notice and what is the general mood of the characters? How does this create drama?
- How does this opening extract differ from the usual Soap conventions? Think particularly about the camera shots, use of music and realism.

Chapter 7. *Brookside* (Channel 4, 1982 / 1995)

Extract Duration: 3 minutes, 40 seconds / 4 minutes, 50 seconds

Writer(s): Phil Redmond / Valerie Windsor

Director: Chris Clough / Brian Lighthill

Cast: Ricky Tomlinson, Sue Johnston, Paul Usher, Simon O'Brian, Doreen Sloane, Jim Wiggins, Nigel Crowley, Katrin Cartlidge, Robert Cullin / Anna Friel, Sarah Maitland, Michael Stark, John Burgess, Marcia Ashton, Tiffany Chapman, Gillian Hanna

Programme context:

Phil Redmond is one of the most well-known drama producers in Britain, having created the long-running children's school drama, *Grange Hill* (BBC, 1978-2008) and Soap Operas, *Brookside* (Mersey Television, 1982-2003) and *Hollyoaks* (Mersey Television, 1995-).

The year before Channel 4's launch in 1982, Redmond secured a £4 million pound investment from the channel to establish his own independent television company, Mersey Television, and began work on *Brookside*. Much of the money was spent buying and fitting-out a real Liverpool housing estate that served as both the company's headquarters and the primary filming location for *Brookside*. The permanent location helped to reduce production costs and contributed to the realistic look of the program.

Redmond himself grew up in a council estate in north Liverpool and his own background had a great impact on his approach to television drama. Airing on the launch night of Channel 4 on 2 November 1982, *Brookside* changed the face of British Soap Opera by tackling more realistic and socially challenging storylines than its rivals. The show soon developed a reputation for featuring taboo subjects, for example, Gordon Collins (Mark Burgess) became Soap's first openly gay character in 1987, and in 1994 actresses Anna Friel and Nicola Stephenson shared British Television's first pre-watershed lesbian kiss. Apart from sensational stories, *Brookside* also tackled problems of unemployment and featured British television's first AIDS storyline. However, there were some socially important stories that even *Brookside* wouldn't tackle, and in 1987 both actor Ricky Tomlinson and writer Jimmy McGovern left the series because of its refusal to tackle the miners strike or the Hillsborough tragedy; two major real-life events at that time.

The controversial nature of many *Brookside* storylines has attracted a great deal of press attention over the years. In 1984, when a character was wrongly convicted for a warehouse robbery the tabloid press launched the "Free George Jackson" campaign, generating a level of media hype never seen before for a UK Soap. This media coverage increased the programme's profile and attracted huge audiences, and is a tactic that has since been used by other Soaps, for example the *EastEnders* "Who Shot Phil Mitchell" storyline or *Coronation Street*'s "Free Deidre Rashid" campaign.

In its aim to be realistic, *Brookside* often used rude language before the watershed, which led to a negative response from many television critics. However, by the mid 1980s the series was enjoying regular ratings of around 8 million people. The program's realist aims and focus on major social issues such as unemployment, rape, drugs, and lesbian politics even won over a middle-class viewers who are not traditionally the Soap genre's target audience.

The 1990s saw *Brookside*'s audience numbers peak and its output increase to three episodes a week. Many critics felt this had something to do with the increased quality of storylines; in 1993, *Brookside*'s most infamous plot centred on the murder of wife beater and child abuser Trevor Jordache (Bryan Murray) by his wife Mandy (Sandra Maitland) and daughter Beth (Anna Friel). Driven to the edge of despair, Mandy and Beth stabbed Trevor in the kitchen and, with the help of neighbour Sinbad (Michael Starke), buried him underneath their patio, where his body remained for over a year. The discovery of his remains in January 1995 and the subsequent murder trial (featured in the accompanying extract) gave the programme its highest ever viewing figures of 9 million people.



But following this exciting and much publicised storyline, some critics felt that *Brookside* became increasingly sensational, creating controversy simply to grab media attention and push up audience ratings. Later storylines included an incestuous relationship between a brother and sister, terrorism at the hands of a gangland boss, and no fewer than six fires and explosions during the Soap's final five years.

By 2002 the show had fallen way behind in Channel 4's schedules, constantly being moved in order to accommodate the channel's new 'reality television' programme, *Big Brother* (Endemol Entertainment, 2000-). *Brookside*'s audience had dwindled to less than 1 million people and that year, "Brookie", as it had become known, was cancelled.

Nevertheless, *Brookside* had helped to add a new seriousness to popular drama and even top programs such as *EastEnders* (BBC, 1985-) and *Casualty* (BBC, 1986-), began to follow *Brookside*'s example and explore contemporary social problems in a more direct and uncompromising way.

Phil Redmond continued to have an impact on the development of the Soap genre; in 1995 he successfully launched *Hollyoaks* (Mersey Television, 1995-), a new Soap Opera aimed specifically at young people.

While watching the first extract:

- Compare this extract to *The Grove Family* clip you saw earlier- how do the following differ; the dialogue, characters, setting, storylines, and camera shots.
- How would you describe the representations of class and family in this extract and do you think these representations are realistic?

While watching the second extract:

- How does this extract use family drama to present wider social issues?
- How do you think this extract balances the controversial storyline with characterisation? How do you feel when watching the clip? Do you feel sorry for Beth and Mandy and if so why?

Chapter 8. *EastEnders* (BBC, 1987 / 1987)

Extract Duration: 4 minutes, 35 seconds / 2 minutes, 35 seconds

Writer(s): Tony Holland / Charlie Humphries

Director: Julia Smith / Mike Gibbon

Cast: Leslie Grantham, Anita Dobson, Letitia Dean, Pam St Clement, Michael Cashman, Gary Hailes, Anna Wing, Peter Dean,

William Boyde, Sandy Ratcliff, June Brown / June Brown, Gretchen Franklin



Programme context:

Created by producer Julia Smith and scriptwriter Tony Holland - who had previously worked together on *Compact* (BBC, 1962-1965) - *EastEnders* (BBC, 1985-) was the BBC's first successful television Soap and is still one of British television's most popular. It began as a rival to ITV's *Coronation Street* (Granada, 1960-) which, by the mid 1980s was dominating the ratings. Within eight months of its launch, *EastEnders* had reached the number one spot in the ratings and has generally remained amongst the top five programmes ever since.

Set in Walford, a fictitious borough of London's East End, *EastEnders* focuses on a number of predominantly working-class families living in Albert Square and much of the action takes place in and around the local pub, The Queen Vic. The East End of London was regarded as the ideal location for a long-running series as its historical significance in British culture made it instantly recognisable. Also, that area of London is inhabited by a very diverse group of people and so it can be used as an example of modern, urban, British communities, containing, as Smith and Holland put it, "multi-racial, larger-than-life characters". This focus on expanding the representation of minority groups was seen in the 1980s as a move away from the traditional Soap Opera format and a way of helping the genre to establish a wider appeal by providing greater opportunities for audience identification. Similarly, *EastEnders* has recently introduced more teenage characters and successful young adults in a bid to capture a younger television audience.

The programme was initially broadcast twice a week, but on different days to ITV's rival Soap, *Coronation Street* to avoid a ratings war. Similarly, a brief dip in audience numbers in the Summer of 1983 led to *EastEnders* being rescheduled to avoid clashing with ITV's more established Soap, *Emmerdale Farm* (Granada, 1972-). *EastEnders* began broadcasting three-time a week in 1994, but by that time creators Smith and Holland had left the show to work on the short lived BBC Soap *Eldorado* (BBC, 1992-1993). *EastEnders* also broadcasts an omnibus edition on Sundays to give people the chance to catch up with storylines they may have missed during the week.

Since it began, *EastEnders* has reflected a modern-day social realism, with storylines focusing on the darker side of life. Throughout its twenty-five year history, *EastEnders* has tackled a variety of taboo subjects, including prostitution, abortion, drug addiction, homelessness, Alzheimer's Disease, HIV, breast cancer, teenage pregnancy, domestic violence, rape, incest, euthanasia and murder. The series was also one of the first to feature a couple in a homosexual relationship. The first episode, broadcast on 19 February 1985, set the dramatic pace with the death of local resident Reg Cox and the first storylines to grab the attention of the media (a sure sign that the series was making an impact on the viewing nation even in its early days) were the pregnancy of unmarried schoolgirl Michelle Fowler and the often turbulent and sometime violent relationship between Angie and Den Watts.

In the early days, much of the action in *EastEnders* centred on two families; the Beales and the Fowlers, but today the central cast is very large (at any one time, around eight families, all living or working in Albert Square, will feature in several storylines) and supporting characters come and go (highlighting the belief that character turnover is essential if a Soap is to remain relevant and successful).

EastEnders exhibits many other characteristics common to successful British Soap Operas (particularly its major competitor, *Coronation Street*), such as the working-class community setting and the large number of strong female characters. In addition, the programme aims to maintain a gender balance by introducing various "macho" male personalities. While maintaining the core Soap Opera characteristics, *EastEnders* also distinguishes itself from the other major British Soaps, appearing faster paced and more dramatic than *Coronation Street*, yet less controversial and more humorous than *Brookside*.

Although the programme has been criticised over the years for its exaggerated dramatic content, *EastEnders* has displayed a social conscience in how it presents socially sensitive storylines. These have been represented as responsibly and realistically as possible in an effort to inform viewers about medical issues (such as AIDS, schizophrenia and dementia) and social issues (such as domestic violence and teen pregnancy), and telephone helplines are often advertised at the end of episodes should viewers want to talk to someone about their own related problems. This attitude fulfils the BBC's public service remit, and yet *EastEnders* producers still maintain that the programme strives to be realistic and relevant rather than issue-led, with the educational element coming out of its commitment to realism, not the other way around.

Like many British Soaps, *EastEnders* differs from American Soaps because of its emphasis on the mundane and gritty working-class lives (rather than middle- or upper-class lives) of ordinary-looking (rather than incredibly attractive) and relatively unsuccessful people. This potentially depressing mix is lightened by occasional humour, by the dramatic intensity of the emotions and issues portrayed, and by the nostalgia provided by the programme's focus on community life.

A regular feature of the weekly schedules, *EastEnders* has become a prominent part of British television culture. Stories such as the 2000-2001 'Who shot Phil Mitchell?' campaign gained a huge amount of press attention, and public and media interest extends beyond plot and character developments to the activities of cast members.

While watching the first extract:

- What social issues are referred to in this extract?
- How do the representations of class and community here compare to those in *Brookside* and *Coronation Street*?

While watching the second extract:

- This episode is an example of a 'Soap bubble'. How does it compare to the Soap extracts you have seen so far? Think particularly about characterisation, setting and dialogue.
- There is a strong feeling of nostalgia in this scene. What is Ethel being nostalgic about and how does this fit into the overall Soap themes of community and setting?
- How does this extract mix drama and comedy, and what effect does this have on the overall tone of the scene?

Chapter 9. *Albion Market* (Granada, 1985)

Extract Duration: 3 minutes, 15 seconds

Writer(s): Chris Curry

Director: Sue Butterworth

Cast: Geoffrey Leesley, Alistair Walker, Peter Benson, Valerie Lilley, Philip Tan, Barbara Wilshire, Burt Caesar, Pik-Sen Lim



Programme context:

Produced by Granada Television in 1985, *Albion Market* was intended as a companion to *Coronation Street* (Granada, 1960-) and a rival to the BBC's new Soap, *EastEnders* (BBC, 1985-). Launched just six months after *EastEnders* and in the same year as *Coronation Street's* 25th Anniversary, Granada's chairman claimed that "When *Coronation Street* celebrates its Golden anniversary, *Albion Market* will be celebrating its silver anniversary", however, the show lasted for just one year.

Set in a covered Manchester market (actually a converted Salford warehouse), the programme had a similar concept to *EastEnders*, focusing on the lives of an ethnically mixed, working-class group of stall holders. The idea was that the show would represent the diversity of British society, and so the characters included native Mancunians, Vietnamese refugee cousins, expelled Ugandans, a Jewish couple and a West Indian café owner.

The show ran twice weekly on Friday and Sunday night in an effort to boost ITV's weekend schedules. It was broadcast in what is traditionally known as the "graveyard slot" of 7.00pm on nights when many viewers are out rather than watching television. These slots were typically filled with programmes imported from America, or British game shows such as *Play Your Cards Right* (LWT, 1979-1999 / TalkbackThames, 2002-2007).

As time went on Granada noticed that viewing figures were dropping below that of *Brookside* on (the then relatively new 'minority' channel) Channel 4, and so sixties pop singer Helen Shapiro was introduced as hairdresser Viv and *Till Death Us Do Part* (BBC, 1965-1975) star Tony Booth as landlord Ted Pilkington, in an effort to boost the show's popularity. But the critics disliked *Albion Market* from the start, and the viewing public did not seem interested either. After exactly 100 episodes the programme was axed and the last episode aired on 24th August 1986.

For many years the outdoor set, complete with its distinctive arch-shaped *Albion Market* sign, could still be seen from Bridge Street in Salford. When the Granada Tours Experience was closed in 1999, the sign was removed, and the building which was once Albion Market now forms part of the Victoria and Albert Hotel.

While watching the extract:

- *Albion Market* was made as a rival to *EastEnders*. What similarities and differences can you see between this extract and the first *EastEnders* extract?
- What evidence can you see of *Albion Market's* aim to represent diversity?
- Why do you think *Albion Market* lasted for such a short time?

Chapter 10. *Eldorado* (BBC, 1993)

Extract Duration: 4 minutes

Writer(s): Tony McHale

Director: Geoff Feld

Cast: Patricia Brake, Campbell Morrison, Julie Fernandez, Jesse Birdsall, Faith Kent, Derek Martin, John Nathan, Sandra Sandri



Programme context:

In the early 1990s, Julia Smith and Tony Holland - the team that developed *Compact* (BBC, 1962-1965) and *EastEnders* (BBC, 1985-) - were asked to devise another BBC serial and, in 1992, they launched *Eldorado* (BBC, 1992-1993). Set in Los Barcos, a fictional Spanish fishing village on the Spanish Riviera, the 'EuroSoap' was based around the lives of British and European expatriates. The BBC hoped it would be as successful as *EastEnders* (BBC, 1985-) and replicate some of the sunshine and glamour of imported Australian Soaps such as *Neighbours* (Grundy Television Australia, 1985-) and *Home and Away* (7 Network, 1988-).

It was made as a co-production between the BBC and independent production company Cinema Verity, and aired three times a week in a high-profile 7pm slot on BBC1 on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. It was then the most ambitious series awarded to an independent company by the BBC and the expensive set, built in the Spanish mountain area of Coin, still stands to this day.

The launch was preceded by a high-profile advertising campaign on television, radio and in the press (trailed in the tabloids as "sun, sex and sangria"), but *Eldorado* was a ratings disaster from the beginning and was cancelled after only one year.

Its problems were varied. Although the show used many professional actors many of the cast were inexperienced. The acting was derided as amateurish, while attempts to appear more 'European' by having people speaking other languages without subtitles or in unconvincing accents was met with confusion and ridicule. As a result of filming in real, bare-walled villas rather than a studio, there were also many acoustic problems that were mockingly called '*Eldorado-Sound*' - a term still used today around the BBC to describe an out-of-place, echoing sound in a recording. Possibly in an attempt to attract media attention, the show also opened with the controversial story of middle-aged man, Bunny (played by Roger Walker) returning from the UK with a seventeen-year-old bride, Fizz (Kathy Pitkin) and many viewers felt this storyline was implausible and seedy. On top of this, ITV decided to air a special one-hour edition of *Coronation Street* (Granada, 1960-) against the first episode of *Eldorado*, to "strangle it at birth" as network executives put it.

Julia Smith soon left the programme and was replaced by Corinne Hollingworth, who had previously worked on *EastEnders*. Hollingworth made many changes to *Eldorado*, hiring new scriptwriters, creating extra rehearsal time, and removing many of the inexperienced and poor actors who had attracted criticism. Towards the end of its run, *Eldorado* was typically receiving a healthy audience of 9-10 million viewers, and yet it was claimed that this was not enough to justify *Eldorado's* continued production, and the new Controller of BBC1, Alan Yentob, cancelled it. Some people involved in the programme's production have said that the motives for cancelling the show were mainly political; they believed that *Eldorado* was axed because it did not fit in with the more serious image of the BBC that the new management wished to present.

Whatever the truth may be behind the programme's failure, it is widely thought that *Eldorado* is the reason why the BBC has not attempted to launch a brand new prime-time Soap since. Instead they have concentrated on developing established drama series such as *Casualty* (BBC, 1986-) and *Holby City* (BBC, 1999-) into year-round productions.

While watching the extract:

- How realistic is this extract in comparison to the others you have seen? Think particularly about the setting, characters and storylines and the audience that may have been watching at the time.
- Why do you think *Eldorado* was not successful? Would you watch the programme if it was still being broadcast and why?

Chapter 11. *Hollyoaks* (Channel 4, 1995)

Extract Duration: 3 minutes, 45 seconds

Writer(s): Phil Redmond

Director: Ken Horn

Cast: Nick Pickard, Will Mellor, Shebah Ronay, Lisa Williamson, Jeremy Edwards, Brett O'Brian, Charles Youlten, Yasmin Bannerman, Guy Parry



Programme context:

Created by Brookside producer, Phil Redmond, *Hollyoaks* was first broadcast on 23 October 1995 on Channel 4. Following in the footsteps of imported Australian 'light entertainment' style Soaps such as *Neighbours* (Grundy Television Australia, 1985-) and *Home and Away* (7 Network, 1988-), the show was developed specifically to appeal to a young audience. For example, the programme has always featured a young and attractive cast for viewers to identify with and aspire to. This has led to many marketing opportunities for the Soap, including annual 'Hollyoaks Babes' and 'Hollyoaks Hunks' cast calendars and even 'his' and 'her' fragrances.

Set in and around the fictional Chester suburb of Hollyoaks and its local higher education college, the majority of the characters are in their late teens or early twenties and since it began in 1995, the cast has expanded from just seven major characters to approximately fifty cast members.

The show was initially broadcast weekly, but in July 1996 Mersey Television opted to re-commission the show and increase its output to twice-weekly episodes. As its popularity increased, a third episode was introduced in September 1999 and a fourth in 2001. In November 2003, the show increased its output further with a fifth episode. Today, the show generally broadcasts at 6:30pm each weekday on Channel 4, with an omnibus edition on Sunday mornings. The show also features occasional late-night spin-off editions, which feature more dramatic or controversial plot lines, which generally fit into the usual *Hollyoaks* storylines (unlike 'Soap bubbles').

Hollyoaks is also broadcast in other countries, including Canada, Norway, Serbia, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, South Africa, America, Ireland, Turkey, New Zealand and parts of Eastern Europe.

Given its large and established audience of young viewers, some feel that *Hollyoaks* is an ideal platform to raise awareness about a variety of social problems and a telephone helpline number is often displayed after episodes that centre on a story that may have affected viewers. For example, a 2007 episode that showed a number of characters falling ill due to carbon monoxide poisoning helped to make one viewer aware that she had been suffering from the same symptoms and trace the problem to a potentially fatal carbon-monoxide leak in her home.

Other storylines that *Hollyoaks* has dealt with include; drug addiction, murder, arson, hit and run, abortion, suicide, homelessness, financial problems, interracial relationships, racism, religion, bisexuality, homosexuality, homophobia, sexual confusion, alcoholism, drug abuse, rape, male rape, cancer, molestation, child abuse, domestic violence, eating disorders, incest, sexual harassment, bullying at school and in the workplace, epilepsy, HIV, self harm, schizophrenia, gambling addiction, shoplifting, fostering, teenage pregnancy, sudden infant death syndrome, miscarriage, kidnapping and surrogacy!

Hollyoaks has received many accolades and awards over the years, including being named Broadcast of the Year at the 2007 Stonewall Awards. Stonewall, an organisation that campaigns for equality for gay men and women, praised the show for its "sympathetic and convincing handling" of the "gritty and emotional" storyline involving John Paul McQueen (James Sutton) and Craig Dean's (Guy Burnet) gay affair storyline.

However, the show has sometimes attracted criticism for its representation of young people. In 2001 students at Chester College objected to a storyline which they believed misrepresented students in the city. Students' Union president Gordon Reay said: "Students at other universities think we are a bunch of radicals and militants because that's how the students are portrayed in *Hollyoaks*. They assume that the college in the programme is Chester College, because *Hollyoaks* is set in the city." Similarly, in March 2009, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers identified *Hollyoaks* as one of a number of programmes thought by its members to be a bad influence on students, encouraging behaviour such as, "answering back, storming off, swearing, aggression and sexually inappropriate behaviour."

Interestingly, *Hollyoaks* defies Soap conventions with its use of incidental music - it is the only major British Soap to use it. Each episode usually begins with a current or recent chart song, and other songs are used during the show (and sometimes at the end of the show instead of the theme tune). Although this could be considered an 'unrealistic' use of music as it does not originate from the action on screen, it helps the show appeal to its target audience and offers yet another marketing opportunity through the release of *Hollyoaks* soundtrack CDs.

While watching the extract:

- What evidence can you see in this extract that the programme is aimed at a young audience? Think particularly about the cast, characters, storylines, dialogue, setting and use of music.
- Would you describe these scenes as realistic? For example, does Jambo's voiceover fit into the 'social realist' Soap tradition?

TV Heaven Plus: Soap Operas Extract Worksheets

Chapter 1. *The Grove Family* (BBC, 1956)

While watching the extract:

- How does the storyline here fit in with the BBC's 'public service' agenda? How do you think this affects the realism of the programme?
- What conventions of the Soap Opera genre can you identify here and which seem to be missing? Think particularly about setting, characters, realism, storylines and narrative themes.

Chapter 2. *Emergency-Ward 10* (BBC, 1964)

While watching the extract:

- From this extract, do you think that *Emergency-Ward 10* was successful in its 'twin narrative' approach?
- How does *Emergency-Ward 10* compare to other medical dramas you may have seen, such as *Casualty*, *Doctors*, or *Holby City*?

Chapter 3. *Coronation Street* (Granada, 1960) / (Granada, 1990)

While watching the first extract:

- What evidence can you see here of *Coronation Street's* aims to be regional and realistic?
- How is *Coronation Street's* target audience catered for here? Think particularly about characters, the setting and narrative themes.

While watching the second extract:

- How do you think the characters and storylines have changed between these two extracts?
- What character 'types' can you identify here?
- What evidence can you see here of *Coronation Street's* traditions for strong female characters, a close sense of community and its later tendency towards comedy?

Chapter 4. *Compact* (BBC, 1964)

While watching the extract:

- How does *Compact* balance personal storylines with a workplace setting?
- The makers of *Compact* hoped the office setting would add realism to the programme. Do you think they were successful?

Chapter 5. *Crossroads* (ATV, 1978)

While watching the extract:

- Based on this extract, do you think *Crossroads* deserved its reputation for low production values and far-fetched scripts?
- How does *Crossroads* create personal drama in a workplace setting?

Chapter 6. *Emmerdale Farm* (Granada, 1972) / *Emmerdale* (Granada, 2006)

While watching the first extract:

- How does the Yorkshire Dales setting of *Emmerdale Farm* influence the themes, characters, and storylines that you can see here?
- What do you think of the representations of class, gender in this extract?

While watching the second extract:

- What differences do you notice in the length and content of these scenes compared to the previous *Emmerdale Farm* extract?
- This is the opening of a special Christmas episode - what festive references do you notice and what is the general mood of the characters? How does this create drama?
- How does this opening extract differ from the usual Soap conventions? Think particularly about the camera shots, use of music and realism.



Chapter 7. *Brookside* (Channel 4, 1982 / 1995)

While watching the first extract:

- Compare this extract to *The Grove Family* clip you saw earlier- how do the following differ; the dialogue, characters, setting, storylines, and camera shots.
- How would you describe the representations of class and family in this extract and do you think these representations are realistic?

While watching the second extract:

- How does this extract use family drama to present wider social issues?
- How do you think this extract balances the controversial storyline with characterisation? How do you feel when watching the clip? Do you feel sorry for Beth and Mandy and if so why?

Chapter 8. *EastEnders* (BBC, 1987 / 1987)

While watching the first extract:

- What social issues are referred to in this extract?
- How do the representations of class and community here compare to those in *Brookside* and *Coronation Street*?

While watching the second extract:

- This is an example of a 'Soap bubble'. How does this compare to the normal Soap extracts you have seen so far? Think particularly about characterisation, setting and dialogue.
- There is a strong feeling of nostalgia in this scene. What is Ethel being nostalgic about and how does this fit into the overall Soap themes of community and setting?
- How does this extract mix drama and comedy, and what effect does this have on the overall tone of the scene?

Chapter 9. *Albion Market* (Granada, 1985)

While watching the extract:

- *Albion Market* was made as a rival to *EastEnders*. What similarities and differences can you see between this extract and the first *EastEnders* extract?
- What evidence can you see of *Albion Market*'s aim to represent diversity?
- Why do you think *Albion Market* lasted for such a short time?

Chapter 10. *Eldorado* (BBC, 1993)

While watching the extract:

- How realistic is this extract in comparison to the others you have seen? Think particularly about the setting, characters and storylines and the audience that may have been watching at the time.
- Why do you think *Eldorado* was not successful? Would you watch the programme if it was still being broadcast and why?

Chapter 11. *Hollyoaks* (Channel 4, 1995)

While watching the extract:

- What evidence can you see in this extract that the programme is aimed at a young audience? Think particularly about the cast, characters, storylines, dialogue, setting and use of music.
- Would you describe these scenes as realistic? For example, does Jambo's voiceover fit into the 'social realist' Soap tradition?

TV Heaven Plus: Soap Operas Evaluation Form

We are currently developing further TV Heaven Plus packs for Media Studies students. We would be grateful if you could take a few moments to fill in the following questions to help us improve our educational offer.

Many thanks,
The TV Heaven team.

What did you like about the TV Heaven Plus: Soap Operas pack?

What could be improved about the TV Heaven Plus: Soap Operas pack?

What other television topics would you like to see covered in TV Heaven?

Any further comments: