

Television: from pre-production to programme making and dissemination

Book or Report Section

Accepted Version

Bignell, J. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4874-1601>
(2024) Television: from pre-production to programme making and dissemination. In: Beloborodova, O. and Van Hulle, D. (eds.) *Toward a Comparative History of the Literary Draft in Europe*. John Benjamins, Amsterdam, pp. 473-486. ISBN 9789027215260 Available at
<https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/115770/>

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See [Guidance on citing](#).

Published version at: <https://www.jbe-platform.com/content/books/9789027246585-chlel.35.33big>

Publisher: John Benjamins

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the [End User Agreement](#).

www.reading.ac.uk/centaur

CentAUR

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

Toward a Comparative History of the Literary Draft in Europe, (eds Olga Beloborodova and Dirk Van Hulle).

Television: from pre-production to programme making and dissemination

Jonathan Bignell

This chapter focuses on the commissioning and script-to-screen process of British television fiction in the 1960s, a period of technical and cultural change. It is often regarded as a ‘Golden Age’ of authorial creativity,¹ but the chapter demonstrates the significant interactions of writers with people in other roles, especially producer, script-editor and director. Primary and secondary historical sources are used to document and evaluate the moulding of initial ‘treatments’ solicited from screenwriters by production staff, and the process of editing and preparing scripts for production. The BBC’s popular, long-running science fiction series *Doctor Who* (1963-89, 2005-) is a key example, focusing on its well-documented beginnings and unexpected success. Constraints in production that affect creative decision-making and the process of planning a programme are discussed, including budgetary limitations, working within a pre-established format and the technical demands of shooting in a television studio. The chapter concludes by discussing how the afterlife of programmes reorients their histories and the contingent, pragmatic decisions that initially shaped their scripts.

Television, like its predecessor radio from which its institutions and working practices largely derive, began by relaying material created in another medium. Its genres of news, drama and entertainment, for example, drew content, forms and personnel from, respectively, newspapers, theatre and vaudeville. In drama, this led to demand for writers and the importance of the script as the creative and legal basis for the work that was produced (Bignell 2019). The massive expansion of broadcast hours, from the few hours per day on a single channel at the beginning of television in Britain in the 1930s to 24-hour broadcasting on hundreds of channels today, has created intense demand for screen writing. Copyright law enshrines moral and legal rights for authors over their work, so screenwriting can potentially be lucrative, especially when programmes are syndicated, repeated or exported overseas, and may also be sold as formats from which local versions can be made (in another language and with local performers, for example). A television script can comprise not only

dialogue but also descriptions of settings and suggested visual emphases to assist the director in realising the action. The script is the authority that determines and records interpretative and expressive decisions. It differs from a theatre play in that it is usually intended to be performed only once, realised by one group of collaborators. Television scripts are rarely remounted and are rarely published in written form, unless they are by an author with a reputation in another medium (like Harold Pinter, to whom I return briefly below as an exception that proves a rule).

The genesis of a television drama

While almost all television fiction is scripted, a television drama begins not with screenwriters but with the institutional gatekeepers who set the parameters for their work. Television pre-production begins with the development of programme ideas and the specification of a programme's form and genre. Once the form, budget, expected broadcast timeslot and kind of audience are set, then writers can make a contribution. Writers supply short treatments and storylines that form the basis for commissioning full scripts. Next, full-length scripts are written and storyboards may be created to work out how the script might be realised in audio-visual form. Possible filming locations are identified, and crews and performers selected. Production schedules are drawn up, and the details of design, props, costumes and music are decided. Production itself is when shooting takes place, working from the budget and schedule to realise the script on time and at the budgeted cost. Post-production is when editing is done, and visual and sound effects are added. Writers' involvement is predominantly in the early stages and is shaped by decisions made by a producer.

Television is a producer's medium, rather than a writer's or a director's, since he or she has authority over and responsibility for originating and managing programme production. The producer selects and works with writers, controls the process of making a programme, and is answerable to the television institution (usually an independent production company or a network) that has commissioned it. Producers work with script editors and production assistants as well as with the director, performers, set, lighting and sound designers, composers of music and then the teams working on publicity and promotion for the programme. Except in the case of the most highly-regarded writers, for whom some conditions might be waived, writers are subject to the constraints set by producers (Murdoch 1980). Creativity and

constraint work together, with the writer's role negotiated throughout in relation to many different opportunities and pressures.

Genre, format, audience and budget

The creation of a programme and the role of writers can be followed closely in the case of *Doctor Who*. The idea came from a producer and not a writer; the experienced Canadian producer Sydney Newman. He came to Britain in 1958 to run the drama series *Armchair Theatre*, made by the British company ABC for the Independent Television (ITV) commercial network. ITV had been set up in 1955 to compete with BBC, and Newman's leadership in drama helped ITV beat BBC's audience ratings for 32 out of 37 weeks between autumn 1959 and summer 1960, with viewers often numbering over 12 million (about a quarter of the UK population). *Armchair Theatre* was an anthology series, meaning that under its umbrella title unconnected one-off dramas by different writers were screened each week. Newman seemed to be able to identify what kinds of plays would draw a mass audience, and he also created popular long-running series including the spy adventure *The Avengers* (1961-9) and children's science fiction, *Pathfinders in Space* (1959), centred on a British space scientist and his children. Each of these would inform the creation of *Doctor Who*. Newman did not write these programmes, but devised their formats: the templates specifying genre, form, protagonists and themes, for which writers were contracted to produce scripts. His success led to the BBC poaching him in 1962 to become its Head of Drama.

Newman began with a move that seemed to disempower writers, by abolishing the BBC's Script Department, which nurtured the skills of adapting existing material for television and developing writing specifically for the medium. He divided Drama into three sub-departments: Plays, Series and Serials. Plays was responsible for single dramas, normally commissioned from writers with an established reputation either in television or theatre. Series dealt with long-running episodic programmes with an established format, to which writers could contribute their own episodes. Serials were weekly dramas, often adaptations of literature, using cliffhangers to encourage viewer loyalty. Newman's changes gave greater power to producers, by focusing their role on the management of a creative team. He allocated script editors to them to deal with the practical details of script production and gave them access to a roster of directors and designers who would realise the scripts. Creating new formats and commissioning

new writers were at the heart of his plans to restore the BBC's dominance in British television.

The transition from daytime to evening programmes on Saturdays was one of Newman's concerns because the adult audience for live afternoon football was so different from the teenage audience watching the subsequent *Juke Box Jury* (1959-67), a pop music panel show, in the early evening. He wanted to make

a children's programme and still attract adults and teenagers. And also, as a children's programme, I was intent upon it containing basic factual information that could be described as educational – or, at least, mind-opening for them. So my first thought was of a time-space machine (thanks to H. G. Wells) in which contemporary characters (one of whom I wanted to be a 12-13 year old) would be able to travel forward and backward in time, and inward and outward in space. (qtd in Bentham, 1986: 38)

This was the genesis of the *Doctor Who* format. Newman specifies the intended audience, the requirement to fulfil BBC's statutory obligations to "inform, educate and entertain" by including educational content alongside adventures in space and time, and the genre of science fiction. Like his previous *Pathfinder* series it would have adult and child characters, plus the possibility of widely differing settings and storylines in historical and futuristic locations. This variety would allow many different contributing writers to suggest and explore the format according to their own interests.

Newman further specified the characters and recurrent settings that scripts would need to include, in what is now known as a 'series Bible' that could be given to writers interested in selling scripts to the producer:

I dreamed up the character of a man who is 764 years old; who is senile but with extraordinary flashes of intellectual brilliance. [...] He didn't know who he was anymore, and neither did the Earthlings, hence his name, Doctor Who [...] he simply pressed the wrong buttons – and kept on pressing the wrong buttons, taking his human passengers backwards and forwards, and in and out of time and space. (qtd in Bentham 1986: 38)

Newman asked his former assistant at ABC, Verity Lambert, to be the producer, and allocated the script-editor David Whitaker to her. Whitaker elaborated the series Bible to include the characters Ian Chesterton, a youthful and ingenious science teacher and Barbara Wright, a young teacher of history, who would accidentally join the Doctor's

teenage granddaughter Susan, their pupil, on the Doctor's travels. With these parameters in place, Lambert and her team sought out writers, aiming to commission plenty of scripts to allow for late delivery or rejection due to cost implications or unsuitability.

In the most prestigious and costly kind of television drama, the one-off television play, the commissioning of writers takes a similar form to how it worked in *Doctor Who*, but with greater leeway for writers to explore form and genre and with greater tolerance for projects that fail to attract critical praise or substantial audiences. In the BBCs flagship *Wednesday Play* (1964-70) for example, also created by Newman, his requirement for contemporary, original dramas that had something to say about social and political affairs necessitated commissioning some unpopular or even scandalous dramas. These high-profile plays had generous budgets and were very varied in form and style (Bignell 2014). The script editor and subsequently producer Irene Shubik, for example, who worked on both *The Wednesday Play* and its successor *Play for Today* (1970-84), recalled that she produced 48 one-off dramas between 1967 and 1973, each commissioned directly from a writer after negotiations with him or her (Shubik 2014). Directors and producers of these prestigious series resisted intervening in the scripts, aiming instead to serve what they perceived to be the writer's intentions. The director Charles Jarrott, for example, who directed Harold Pinter's original drama *Tea Party* for BBC in 1965, recalled: "When I read it, it seemed to me it was a mathematical play [...] the way the dialogue was written had a kind of symmetry." (qtd in Bilbow 1966: 10) Pinter's script contained very few stage directions and no suggestions for visual emphasis, so Jarrott instructed the three studio camera operators and vision mixer to compose their shots and cut from one camera to another in a specific way:

I cut mathematically from long shot to two-shot – to reverse two-shot – to medium close-up – to medium close-up – to close-up – to wide-shot – to wide-shot. It all had a rhythm which matched the pace of the dialogue, and I felt it contributed to and helped the dialogue because it matched the pace of the writing. (qtd in Bilbow 1966: 10)

The situation was very different for weekly episodic drama like *Doctor Who*, where everyone from senior television executives, producers, script editors, designers, directors and actors could intervene and change the writer's script.

Lambert's team produced a six-page outline that they sent to prospective writers for *Doctor Who* in 1963. It explained that:

Since this is primarily a series of stories concerning people rather than studio effects, and the original characters and backgrounds have been prepared already, the writer will be asked to submit a story line from which he [sic] will be commissioned. This need not go into fractional detail - three or four pages of quarto ought to be sufficient to express the idea. (undated, BBC WAC T5/647/1)

This initial story outline (a treatment) was in effect a pitch for a commission, and subsequently writers would work closely with "the story editor who will work out their plots and situations with them and arrange meetings with the Associate Producer who acts as the arbiter on technical and factual detail." (*ibid.*) Writers were essential but their creative latitude was institutionally constrained.

The budget for making the first 13 episodes of *Doctor Who* in Autumn 1963 was £2,500 per episode (BBC WAC T5/647/1), across three stories (of four, seven and two episodes respectively), to cover scripts, design, scenery, location filming and almost everything else. The small budget and short lead-time required Lambert's team to look for reliable and established, but cheap, television writers for their new series. A writer would create a storyline and script for a serial comprising, for example, six 25 minute episodes for a fee of about £1,500. Later, in September 1964 Whitaker considered asking professional science fiction novelists to offer storylines (BBC WAC T5/647/1). This was not only to generate fresh script ideas but also to save money. An author might write a short storyline for £400, comparing well with the £750 he or she would earn from a 10 per cent royalty on a full-length novel selling 10,000 copies at 15 shillings each. Whitaker calculated that a skilled adaptor for television could be paid £175 each episode to translate the idea into 6 episode scripts, making an overall total of £1,450, somewhat less than the cost of a professional screenwriter. The plan was never followed through and in general British broadcasters cultivated radio writers and theatre dramatists instead of novelists, because they could write for the practical constraints of television production. While the *Doctor Who* team clearly understood and had connections with literary authorship and publishing, they regarded screenwriting as a specific kind of cultural production.

The script that saved the series

Whitaker contacted the writers' agency Associated London Scripts (ALS) and eventually commissioned 14 initial scripts for *Doctor Who*, of which nine were from ALS writers (Bignell and O'Day, 2004: 36). ALS was formed by and mainly comprised the dominant comedy writers in Britain at the time (such as Spike Milligan, Eric Sykes, Ray Galton and Alan Simpson) with Beryl Vertue as secretary.² Its writers were adept at quickly writing short sketches and half-hour comedy dramas for stars such as Frankie Howerd and Tony Hancock. ALS's versatile writers had also worked on Newman's ATV series *The Avengers* and *Pathfinders*. On the strength of a script he had written for ABC's science fiction anthology *Out of this World*, Whitaker approached the ALS writer Terry Nation. Nation was initially uninterested in *Doctor Who* because he was busy writing for Hancock's new television series and regional theatrical tour (Hancock and Nathan, 1975: 126-8). But Nation argued with Hancock, returned to London and reconsidered his refusal of the BBC's offer. Instead, Nation began working on a storyline titled *The Mutants* (Brunt and Pixley 1998: 112), in which the Doctor and his companions arrived on a devastated planet ruled by ruthless and violent creatures, the Daleks, each living inside an armoured metal casing. Whitaker commissioned a screenplay on the basis of this treatment, the third *Doctor Who* story scheduled for broadcast, preceded by Anthony Coburn's *An Unearthly Child* and *Marco Polo* by John Lucarotti, two of Nation's ALS colleagues.³

Once scripts have been delivered, producers and script editors work on them to make them fit the budget, ensure that continuing characters are consistently portrayed, and consider the practicality of scenic design and special effects. While such revisions are done in consultation with writers, the eventual shooting script may have been extensively revised and the authorship of television programmes is a collective activity. In the case of *Doctor Who*, Lambert worked not only with Whitaker as script editor but also with Mervyn Pinfield, a technical adviser who had trained new directors and had a strong technical background in the BBC's Langham Group, a team working on experimental visual techniques. Lambert's team had to find ways of realising vaguely described script ideas in practical, material ways using cutting-edge video technologies. For example, inlay and overlay enabled one image to be electronically superimposed on or inserted into another during shooting. Split screen composited two images together on-screen, and video feedback was generated when an electronic camera shot its own video output, resulting in patterns of visual interference. *Doctor Who* used video feedback to create moving cloud-like streams in

its uncanny opening title sequence, while inlay and overlay enabled live action to be combined with models and backgrounds to realise alien planet settings. All this was done very quickly: *Doctor Who* was to be screened for 48 weeks of the year, necessitating a punishing recording schedule in which the actors rehearsed between Monday and Thursday each week and taped an episode each Friday at the BBC's small Lime Grove studio. Their performance was shot in story order in long unbroken sequences, with up to three video cameras shooting the action from different positions. In the studio, the director oversaw the previously rehearsed camera movements and a vision mixer cut in real time from one camera to another. So while *Doctor Who* was not live, it was performed as-if live in the studio. Writers' scripts had to be feasible to shoot with minimal opportunities for retakes or taking the action outside the studio environment (BBC WAC T5/647/1).

The screenplays for *Doctor Who* were produced by a young and newly assembled staff, on a tight budget with short timescales but with access to up-to-the-minute production methods. Lambert recalled that:

Sydney [Newman] decided that *Doctor Who* should be a place where young people worked. I was a young Producer, and he thought it would be a good training ground for promising up and coming Directors as well. [...] I liked to balance things by including a few established stalwarts, like Christopher Barry, whom I could rely on to be very efficient and get shows together on time. With the first Dalek one, for example, I let Richard Martin, again a new Director, do a few episodes but under the wings of Christopher who set up the serial and so, kind of, held his hand (qtd in Bentham 1986: 93).

In the case of Nation's script for *The Daleks*, Lambert's team had to work out what the Daleks and their home planet would look like and how they would be operated during production, for example. Moreover, continuous recording on videotape in story order, as if live in a theatre, made four main characters useful. The dramatic action needed to be arranged so that when one pair was performing in one studio set, the others could rush across the studio and be ready on a different set to perform the next part of the story.

Nation had been a teenager in Cardiff during the Second World War and was interested in the rise of dictatorships and how technology had been harnessed for total war (Turner 2011: 11-46). The early 1960s was during the ongoing Cold War between the Western powers and the Communist blocs of the Soviet Union and China, and in

addition to the threat of thermonuclear conflict the recent invention of the neutron bomb raised the possibility of killing people but leaving buildings intact. This informed the scenario of Nation's screenplay, written in the summer of 1963 when the first Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was signed by the UK, USA and China. The screenplay began with the Doctor and his companions' arrival on the planet Skaro where the population had been irradiated and the survivors subjected to biological mutation, hence Nation's initial title *The Mutants*. Its progress from the initial treatment of July 1963 to shooting in November is described in detail by Brunt and Pixley (1998: 21) who quote Nation's description of the Dalek city in episode 1 'The Dead Planet':

The streets are roofed. The shops are filled with foodstuffs that crumble at a touch. The buildings are more modern than those they know on Earth, glass being widely used in design. [...] The floors and roadways are made from metal. There are no steps anywhere, only sloping ramps. Dr Who [sic] is quite excited. They make their headquarters in what appears to be a public building. Dr Who directs each of them to go in a different direction and find, if they can, books, or whatever replaced books. Dr Who hopes to learn something of the history of the planet.

The intact city with its desiccated organic material seems to derive from 1960s developments in nuclear warfare, while the metal cityscape is a common science fictional trope that may have derived from Nation's reading of work by Philip K. Dick, Clifford Simak and E. M. Forster.⁴ Newman had conceived *Doctor Who* with reference to Wells's *Time Machine*, and the novella's film adaptation (1960) also influenced Nation's screenplay.⁵ The theme of exploration and the separation of one group of characters from another derive from the adventure story and its implementation in as-if live video recording. Nation's ideas were well-suited to the genre, format and conditions of production on *Doctor Who*.

However, Whitaker's undated editorial report on Nation's screenplay (BBC WAC T5/647/1) listed 13 points where clarification of the plot was needed, or where further dramatic turning points could enliven the story. It also suggested scientific explanations for story events, such as how the Daleks are powered by static electricity conducted through their metal city's floor, enabling the protagonists to immobilise them. Similarly, when the scripts of the first two episodes were given to the director, Barry, he sent back heavily annotated copies on 18 October 1963 (BBC WAC

T5/647/1), mainly to ask for the characters' motivations and emotions to be developed. He concluded:

It seems that Terry Nation feels that once he has told the audience something the characters need no longer react to the situation. He is continually having them accept a situation in a most undramatic manner, and therefore losing a lot of potential value.

He made similarly detailed comments on the story's other episodes, pointed out continuity errors and bemoaned the lack of opportunity Nation had allowed for the actors and director to give colour and depth to the characters.

Nation's script contained little detail about the two surviving races on Skaro. One was the Thals, blond-haired, athletic humanoids living in the petrified forests, contrasting in appearance to their enemies the Daleks. Nation's design brief for the Daleks specified "4 Hideous Machine like creatures (Special Effects) legless moving on round bases, no human features. Lens on flexible shaft as Eye. Arms with Mechanical grips for hands. Strange weapons." (BBC WAC T5/647/1). The designer allocated to the story, Ray Cusick, telephoned Nation to discuss how these creatures might be realised. Nation reminded him of the Georgian State Dancers, a troupe recently touring London who moved with a gliding motion, dressed in long full-skirted costumes. Then, while having lunch with Barry and Pinfield, Cusick moved one of the pepperpots on the table to explain the movement he was looking for, inspiring his eventual design. Cusick, a BBC employee, received no royalties for his work on the visual design of the Daleks but Vertue had negotiated with the BBC for Nation, a freelance writer, to retain copyright in the concept. This was to be a significant development affecting writers' livelihoods.

Fig. 1. The first glimpse of a Dalek at the end of *Doctor Who*, 'The Daleks', episode 1 (BBC, 1963).

Fig. 2. The Daleks revealed at the start of *Doctor Who*, 'The Daleks', episode 2 (BBC, 1963).

The seven-part serialisation of Nation's story required him to build in climaxes at the ends of each episode, and at the end of episode 1 the first glimpse of a Dalek (Fig. 1) was incredibly impactful. While exploring underground in the Daleks'

metal city Barbara is suddenly attacked when a panel opens behind her and “a pair of grotesque arms move out to encircle her” (Brunt and Pixley, 1998: 21). The shooting script changed this so that a camera takes the position of the as-yet unseen Dalek, moving towards Barbara who is cowering against a metal wall. From the bottom of the camera frame an extended metal arm reaches out towards her as she screams in terror, then the episode ends. The Daleks’ appearance, resembling a small military tank, was fully revealed in the second episode (Fig. 2), and at the end of the fourth the claw of a squid-like creature groping out from inside the metal shell hinted at what the beings inside the Dalek machines might be. Nation’s original storyline ended after the Doctor stops a battle between the Thals and the Daleks when he discovers that neither caused the war that devastated their planet. At that moment rockets from another civilisation move towards Skaro and: “The prospect of an attack from an outside agent provides the best possible unifying motive for the Thals and the Dalek [...] Jointly they plan their defence as the rockets move closer to the planet” (Brunt and Pixley 1998: 33). When the new invaders advance on the Dalek city the Daleks fire on them to no effect and the Doctor acts as mediator:

Dr Who advances on the invaders unarmed and attempts to make contact [...] Skaro finally learns the truth. These people come from a planet that [...] fired Neutron bombs on Skaro. Since that time, their own civilization has progressed and they have realised the enormity of the crime. (Brunt and Pixley 1998: 33)

The arrival of another alien race as a *deus ex machina* was rejected by the production team and the shooting script concludes more simply with the peaceful Thals defeating the fascistic Daleks, having gained self-confidence from the Doctor and his companions. The protagonists then leave for their next adventure.

The budget for each *Doctor Who* episode allowed for seven days’ design work and 500 hours of set construction, but Nation’s *The Daleks* scripts were estimated to require 4,000 hours’ work over the seven episodes and contracting an external company to build the Daleks themselves was estimated at up to £8,000 (BBC WAC T5/647/1). The producers, designers and planners sent a flurry of memos to each other complaining about the extra work and overspending that Nation’s script entailed, to the extent that Donald Baverstock (Controller of BBC1) wrote on 18 October 1963 (BBC WAC T5/647/1) to Newman’s deputy Donald Wilson to say that *Doctor Who*’s sets and special props were too expensive; he told Newman not to proceed and to

prepare plans for a new children's series for New Year 1964. Moreover, a series of problems beset *Doctor Who*'s recently shot first story, *An Unearthly Child*. Its quality was criticised by Newman and Wilson, there had been production problems including cameras hitting scenery and sound effects overwhelming actors' voices, and the Doctor himself was perceived as too aggressive. The first story was re-recorded but its transmission was then delayed by the assassination of President Kennedy. The story planned to follow it had been dropped, so even though Wilson hated Nation's script it was rushed into production early. Part-way through shooting *The Daleks*, mediocre audience survey results on the first story arrived and Baverstock cancelled *Doctor Who* before it had properly begun.

However, Lambert protested and the cancellation was postponed, by which time the sudden popularity of Nation's story ensured the survival of *Doctor Who*. Producers and executives regularly received reports on the audience share gained by their programme, recording the percentage of the UK population viewing it, and also a Reaction Index deriving from the scores given by the BBC's representative audience sample. *The Daleks* episode 1 (21 December 1963) had an audience of 14 per cent (about 7 million viewers) and a Reaction Index of 59. By the final episode, *The Daleks* was watched by a remarkable 21 per cent of Britons (11 million viewers) with a Reaction Index of 65 (BBC WAC T5/648/1). These figures showed that Nation's relatively simple action-adventure scripts were the key to sustaining large audiences. Furthermore, the ratings, audience survey responses and appreciation scores were closer to those expected for weekday evening peak time viewing than for the unpromising Saturday afternoon slot allocated to *Doctor Who*. Newman recalled:

I had specifically said at the start that I didn't want any bug-eyed monsters in the series, so when Verity [Lambert] came up with the Daleks, I bawled her out. [...] Although it was absolutely not what I had wanted, I must admit that it was the Daleks which really established the programme as a great success!

(qtd in Search, 1983)

The Daleks' ratings placed it in the top 20 programmes and Newman's aim to use the series strategically in the BBC schedule to gather up audiences for the subsequent Saturday evening programmes seemed to work.

Newman and many other senior BBC executives watched the early *Doctor Who* episodes and sent memos to Lambert with comments and recommendations. For example, Newman wrote to Lambert on 6 January 1964 praising the way Nation had

exploited the idea (actually not his own) that the Daleks were powered by static electricity to enable the protagonists to escape from a Dalek prison cell. At the same time he criticised the stark opposition between the angelic Thals and the evil Daleks:

Despite the blonde faeries this last episode, “The Escape” contained one very marvellous thing which you should attempt to duplicate as often as possible. I am referring to the *demonstration* of intelligence by our four heroes - you know the way they figured out how Daleks operated their machines and how to disable them. (BBC WAC T5/647/1)

Newman copied both Whitaker into this memo and also Kenneth Adam, Director of Television and near the top of the BBC hierarchy. Baverstock wrote to Newman on 31 December 1963 with the good news that he would extend *Doctor Who*, but he also took the opportunity to criticize Nation’s screenwriting:

I need from you now an outline of the future storylines with their locations in space and time. I hope that in these you will brighten up the logic and inventiveness of the scripts. In the episodes already recorded we have seen Dr. Who [sic] and his daughter, though ageless and miraculously clever, reduced to helpless unscientific ordinariness once they left their spaceship [...] Likewise, the characters of the past and future should also have appeared more strikingly and differently ingenious — the one more often reminding us of lost simple knowledge; the other of credible skills and capacities that can be conceived likely in the future. I suggest that you should make efforts in future episodes to reduce the amount of slow prosaic dialogue and to centre the dramatic movements much more on historical and scientific hokum. (BBC WAC T5/647/1)

Nation’s plotting and dialogue were formulaic, requiring much input from Lambert’s production team, but they used the resources of Newman’s original format and the technical capabilities of 1960s multi-camera studio shooting to produce landmark moments in television.

Beyond the script

The continuing success of *Doctor Who* was significantly dependent on Nation’s creation of the Daleks, though their development was not under Nation’s authorial control. Their brand identity reached across multiple media and into merchandising, spin-offs and licensed products. Whitaker wrote the first novelisation adapted from

Doctor Who (Whitaker 1964), significantly changing the origin story devised by Newman and recounting the encounter with the Daleks through Chesterton's first-person point of view. In 1965-6 Whitaker scripted a Dalek comic-strip in *TV Century 21*, a children's comic, and he was jointly the screenwriter of the series' spin-off cinema films, *Doctor Who and the Daleks* (1965) and *Daleks Invasion Earth 2150 A.D.* (1966). Whitaker also wrote a theatre play, *Curse of the Daleks* (1965), performed at Christmas matinées in London. Nation's creations were a multimedia phenomenon that included everything from a Christmas pop record to Dalek badges, toy Daleks, branded soap, slippers, jigsaw puzzles, a card game and children's pyjamas (BBC WAC T5/647/1). This was unusual for the early 1960s and prefigures the cross-media promotion and franchising often assumed only to have got under way with *Star Wars* (1977).

Neither Whitaker nor Nation owned rights to the BBC's *Doctor Who* format. Their opportunities to benefit financially were limited to exploiting properties the BBC did not own, especially the Daleks, and Nation sold several further Daleks scripts to *Doctor Who*:

The *Dr. Who* [sic] scripts became my Saturday job. They were written one a week, each Saturday. It would be wrong to claim, as many people have, that I've grown wealthy on the strength of the Daleks. I've been earning my living as a writer for nearly 20 years, and of that time perhaps three months have been devoted to *Who* scripts. (Nation, 1973)

Nation's screenwriting career was indeed of greater breadth (Bignell and O'Day, 2004). He wrote screenplays for other adventure series, including Newman's creation *The Avengers* in 1968-9, and he devised the formats of two major BBC prime-time series. *Survivors* (1975-7) was about humankind's decimation by a global pandemic and the slow rebuilding of civilisation subsequently. *Blake's 7* (1978-81) was a science fiction adventure in which a motley band of dissidents fight against a fascistic galactic empire. As his career progressed, Nation focused on devising series formats rather than screenwriting, because as creator he owned copyright in his formats and gained income whenever other writers contributed episodes to them.

This chapter has aimed to give due prominence to the television writer's role in creating screen drama. Especially in its "Golden Age", but also today, the continual industrial production of television content produces intense demand for writing. With the exception of a few lauded writers who are courted by producers and whose work

is left relatively unmodified, screenwriters are required to form relationships and collaborate with the producers (and other staff) who set the parameters for their work, employ them for specific short-term commissions and modify their writing during production. Television scripts need to suit the format, genre, audience and budget of the programme for which they are created and can often be significantly changed in response to the aesthetic judgements of production staff. Pragmatic considerations also condition what is possible in the pressurized environment under which a script is realised by the numerous professionals who design, shoot and perform it. When BBC rebooted *Doctor Who* in 2005, it was inconceivable that Daleks would not appear, and Rob Shearman was selected by producer Russell T. Davies to write *Dalek* (2005), the sixth episode in the new series, based on an earlier audio drama by Shearman with extensive revisions by the production team and especially Davies himself (Tardis, 2021). As the example of Nation's hastily-conceived story about the Daleks shows, a script can have a colossal and long-lasting cultural and economic impact.

References

BBC Written Archives Centre (WAC) file T5/647/1, 'Doctor Who - General; 1963-4'.

BBC WAC T5/648/1, 'Doctor Who General B'.

Bentham, Jeremy, *Doctor Who: The Early Years* (London: W H Allen, 1986).

Bignell, Jonathan, 'The spaces of the Wednesday Play (BBC TV 1964–1970): production, technology and style', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 34:3 (2014), 369-89.

Bignell, Jonathan, 'Performing the identity of the medium: adaptation and television historiography', *Adaptation*, 12:2 (2019), 149-64.

Bignell, Jonathan and Andrew O'Day, *Terry Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, (2004).

Brunt, David and Andrew Pixley, *The Doctor Who Chronicles: Season One* (London: Doctor Who Appreciation Society, 1998).

Daleks Invasion Earth 2150 A.D. (d. Gordon Flemyng, w. Milton Subotsky, AARU Prod., BBC, Amicus Prod., UK, 1966).

Dick, Philip K., 'Imposter', *Astounding Science Fiction*, June 1953.

Doctor Who and the Daleks (d. Gordon Flemyng, w. Milton Subotsky, AARU Prod., British Lion Films, Amicus Prod., UK, 1965).

Forster, E. M., 'The Machine Stops', *Oxford and Cambridge Review*, November 1909.

Hancock, Freddie and David Nathan, *Hancock A Personal Biography* (London: Coronet 1975).

Murdoch, Graham, 'Authorship and organization', *Screen Education*, 35 (1980), 19–34.

Nation, Terry 'Two of the Daleks live in my front drive', *Radio Times Doctor Who* 10th anniversary special, 19-26 November 1973, 38.

Search, Gay 'In the beginning', *Radio Times Radio Times Doctor Who 20th Anniversary Special*, 19-26 November 1983, 4.

Shubik, Irene, 'Television drama series: a producer's view', in Jonathan Bignell and Stephen Lacey (eds), *British Television Drama: Past, Present and Future, second edition* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 45-51.

Simak, Clifford, 'Immigrant', *Astounding Science Fiction*, March 1954.

The Time Machine, d. George Pal, 1960.

Star Wars, w. and d. George Lucas, Lucasfilm, USA 1977.

Tardis Data Core, The, 'Dalek (TV story): story notes' at [https://tardis.fandom.com/wiki/Dalek_\(TV_story\)#Story_notes](https://tardis.fandom.com/wiki/Dalek_(TV_story)#Story_notes) (consulted 5 August 2021).

Turner, Alwyn, *The Man Who Invented the Daleks: The Strange Worlds of Terry Nation* (London: Aurum, 2011).

Whitaker, David, *Doctor Who and the Daleks* (London: Frederick Muller, 1964).

¹ Five television writers and producers express this view in their contributions to Bignell and Lacey (2014), for example.

² Virtue later sold successful British comedy formats to the USA and founded Hartswood Films which made *Sherlock* (2010-17) for BBC, produced by her daughter Sue and written by her son-in-law Steven Moffat. Moffat became the showrunner of the rebooted *Doctor Who* (2005-) from 2009-17.

³ Both were historical stories. Coburn's concerned the protagonists' arrival in the Stone Age, and Lucarotti's story was based on an encounter with Marco Polo on his expedition to China.

⁴ In 1962 Nation scripted adaptations of Dick's 'Imposter' (1953) and Simak's 'Immigrant' (1954) for *Out of this World* and also an original screenplay. The counterpoint between city and Nature is the central trope of Forster's 'The Machine Stops' (1909).

⁵ The *Time Machine* film adaptation includes a scene, not in Wells' novella, in which the Time Traveller provokes the passive Eloi to fight the atavistic, violent Morlocks, paralleling a sequence in the final episode of *The Daleks* when the Doctor persuades the passive Thals to attack the Daleks.