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## Leading, Collaborating, Championing: RED's Arresting Women

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**Keywords:** RED Production Company; Nicola Shindler; 'quietly feminist'; Sally Wainwright; television; collaboration.

As Julia Hallam (2000: 141) notes, the 'persistent marginalisation of women writers [occurs] not only in the TV industry itself but also within the critical institutions of the academy.' This marginalisation of women writers and indeed other important female storytellers from the realms of 'quality' television – be it the industry, in television texts themselves, or in academic writing on or by women – is a problem that has been addressed most recently by Rachel Moseley, Helen Wheatley and Helen Wood in the collection *Television For Women: New Directions* (2017). As well as pointing to 'key gaps in the critical work on television's address to women, and a series of absences in our historical understanding of this programming', the authors and contributors also seek to attend to conversations regarding the national specificity of television as well as to 'reveal new histories [...] and tell us something about what was happening to women's television in the contemporary moment' (Ibid., 2-3). These aims are shared in this article. With a specific focus on the company RED, I consider the gendering of the industrial landscape, in particular picking up on the question of 'what kinds of heretofore invisible (or under-attended) roles [have] been played by women in producing programming?' (Ibid., 2), as well as issues regarding the critical and cultural position of women's televisual authorship.

Nicola Shindler, the founder of RED Production Company, notes on various platforms, including the company website, that: 'RED is always proud to put the writer at the heart of every show' ('About Us': 2018a). Although analysis of RED by Andrew Spicer and Steve Presence (2016) backs up this claim, they do so through the lens of an organisational culture model, rather than foregrounding or exploring the issue of gender. Addressing this gap, this paper builds on the work of Ruth McElroy

(2017) to analyse the arresting nature of RED's feminist make up, with a specific focus on collaborations between Shindler, and BAFTA winning television writer, Sally Wainwright.

Structurally, this article works to think through the industrial conditions in which RED's work happens, moving from the industrial and contextual outwards, to examine the textual. Assessing Shindler's working practices of leading, collaborating with and championing professional women, I discuss the labour of RED as feminist work, asking how Shindler self-narrativises the work of RED, in order to trace and think through the tensions and complexities between the environment, make up and practices of RED as a company, and the frequently gendered televisual work that it produces. Lastly, this article works to identify and consider a third gap - that between Shindler's commercially orientated self-narrativisation of RED, and academic analyses of RED to date.

### **Engendering Television**

My starting point for this article is simple - Shindler is an 'arresting' woman – extraordinary, professional, articulate, creative and a highly competent leader. As an individual, Shindler's history points to an imperative and incisive interest in stories. She read history at Cambridge, went on to work at The Royal Court in London, and then took her story and scripting skills to the television industry, working first in London and then in Manchester. Founding RED as an independent television drama production company in Manchester in 1998 at the age of 29, Shindler has, over the last 20 years, successfully steered the company through several industrial, policy related and commercial changes, from the introduction of The Communications Act in 2003,<sup>1</sup> to selling a majority stake in RED to the French media company StudioCanal in 2013. What has remained constant throughout however, is Shindler's control of the types of stories that the company tells, and her insistence on and facilitation of effective collaboration. In her own words, she notes: 'Collaboration is the hardest thing in the world but it's also about not having too much ego. You can know you're right, but you have to understand other people's point of view' (Shindler, 2018). This

acknowledgement of the importance of others' points of view, further extends to Shindler's understanding of the need for different and engaging voices on television. Responding in interview to a question about how she fosters collaborations with writers, Shindler notes:

I meet them, and we talk about the work we like, and we talk about what they want to write, and I talk probably a little bit about what the world wants to see right now, and we come to a place where either one of their ideas is going to work, or, we're going to come to them with ideas – and then we just start talking and they send material. And what I can do well is respond to material – so I'm not a writer. I don't work with a blank piece of paper. But I'm very good at responding. So, I will tell them that I think it's good, that I think that that character needs to be this, or that character could be bigger, or just go write it. It's fantastic. And what you're trying to do all the time is get the best out of their voice – so, never make it *your* voice, always make it *their* voice and what *they* want to write and try and draw it the best way it can be. Stories have to be structured in a certain way to make them work on telly, but voices can be very individual. (Shindler, 2018).

This reflection on the importance of voice is interesting in a number of ways. For the purposes of this article, the significance of voice and of individual as well as collaborative voices, of listening and responding and thus shaping and building a story, works in a structural sense to organise the material that is presented here. As an academic analysis of RED and, more broadly, as a reflection on the gendered work of RED over the last 20 years, the voices of the Shindler and Wainwright are integral to the shape of this piece. As the head of RED, Interviewing Shindler was of critical importance. That is not to say that I take her words entirely at face value and give them precedence above all else, but *is* to say that it is problematic to write about the company without acknowledging and taking into account the oral history and stories that its founder offers up. As Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack argue, 'oral history interviews provide an invaluable means of generating new insights about women's experiences of themselves in their worlds' (1991: 11), and indeed Shindler's

experience of RED, her narrativisation of it, is key to articulating RED's identity. When Creative Director of RED, Caroline Hollick, was asked to describe RED earlier this year, her response was arresting: 'RED is Nicola' (Hollick, 2018). As Shindler aims to collaborate with writers and to place them at the heart of the company in order to tell effective and affective stories, so I aim to give Shindler and Wainwright's own stories and oral histories centre stage, looking in close-up at their thoughts before reflecting on their narratives to produce a feminist record of RED.

### **Shindler: 'Quietly Feminist'**

The relationship between Shindler and what Vicky Ball (2012) refers to as television's recent 'process of feminisation', is a rather complex one. Firstly, as McElroy reminds us, it is 'misleading when individual prominent women in managerial roles are used metonymically to stand for a whole workforce' (2017: 39). I do not wish to suggest that Shindler's labour – particularly in relation to female centred collaboration - is akin to the rest of the TV industry. Rather, I want to argue that one of the most exceptional qualities of Shindler, is that, unlike many other senior production personnel, she *is* in the business of and makes it her business to support women working in television – both writers, producers, editors, creative directors and performers. While never overtly nominating herself or the company as feminist, Shindler, I propose, is 'quietly feminist'.

Writing in 1994, Lesley A. Hall (archivist at the Wellcome Library) used the term 'quietly feminist' in an essay on women in medicine and biomedical sciences to refer to and characterise Honor Bridget Fell, an expert in tissue culture. Fell, Hall argues, changed the culture in her own world-leading laboratory to become more familial – staff came together at tea-time to discuss their work informally, worked on a weekend to conceptualise new projects, and did a number of what Hall calls 'quietly feminist' activities, including 'being involved in organisations representing women in science and in education, addressing girls' schools on speech days on the delights of a scientific career, encouraging the career development of women in science and, although unmarried, was

sympathetic to the needs of women combining a career with marriage and motherhood' (1994: 199). In many ways, Fell's work in this regard can be compared to that of Shindler. While neither woman designates their labour or indeed the working environments that they create and shape as explicitly feminist, the practices involved are undeniably so. When interviewing Shindler, I asked her what value she ascribed to working with professional women at RED. She noted:

Well, as you can see, we're a company very much run by women. There's only 3 men [out of 24 employees] in the whole company, and that is a position I'm really comfortable with. I think there's just brilliant women out there doing brilliant jobs who need a bit of flexibility, who are understanding and appreciative of what we are trying to do here. I mean, it's always been important to me that women should be able to have families and work and if someone says 'I just need to come in late because I have to go to an assembly', or they have to go because a child's ill, then I understand because I've got 3 children. I think some male employers will understand as well. In terms of doing a job, I don't think it's about male or female, I think it's just about personality. (Shindler, 2018)

Shindler's recognition of some women's need for flexibility, particularly in relation to caring duties, is certainly what might be termed as feminist practice here, however, her closing statement, in which she notes 'I don't think it's about male or female', points to some of the tensions and complexities of her self-narrativisation of RED. On the one hand, Shindler notes that her company is dominantly female and that she is comfortable with that. However, the comfort that she speaks of in relation to it is not one that is felt from a distance, as her narrative might suggest, but rather is one that she has actively constructed. It is Shindler who chooses her employees and oversees the balance of staff. It is also Shindler's ethos of a more holistic view of working life, that arguably allows her to get the best out of her collaborators and demonstrates an understanding of the realities of combining professional work with parental or caring labour. Bearing this in mind, Shindler's refusal to name RED as a feminist company may appear perplexing, but as a successful leader in independent

television production, her reticence to nominate RED as feminist does not mean that the company does not operate in this way, but rather, suggests that she is highly aware of the larger industrial story – that if RED is seen as a feminist production company, there is a potential for misunderstanding and lost opportunities in relation to working with excellent men as well as excellent women. While operating to support other professional women in order to produce the best televisual work possible, RED's feminism is arguably experiential for its employees and collaborators. As in all good stories, the best lines are sometimes those that are evident in the subtext of the narrative rather than those that are stated 'on the nose'.

Considering the broader industrial landscape of British television, Shindler's refusal to name RED as a feminist company is, in many ways, understandable in an industry that, like many, has form in relation to a lack of inclusivity for women, ethnic minorities and those with disabilities. As Sharon White, Chief Executive of Ofcom noted in the Diversity and Equal Opportunities in Television report (September 2017): 'Women and ethnic-minority employees are significantly under-represented in senior roles across UK-based broadcasters.' In addition, Ofcom statistics published in 2017 show that:

Across the UK-based industry, employees are 52% male and 47% female, compared with the UK population profile of 49% male and 51% female. As with the main five broadcasters, employees are increasingly likely to be male the more senior the role. Board and non-executive level jobs are 63% male, at senior management 59% and at mid and junior management 55%. (Ofcom, 2017)

The above figures, while admittedly extracted from the British broadcasting rather than production landscape, operate in significant contrast to practice at RED, where senior staff make up 29.17% of the company, and 71.4% of senior staff are women. In non-percentage terms, RED has seven senior members of staff, five of whom are women, and two of whom are men.<sup>2</sup> While this is significantly positive in terms of addressing the industry gender imbalance noted by Ofcom, we can also harness

other useful information from these figures. Out of the three male staff in the company, two hold senior positions. While it is not my intention to debate the rights or wrongs of these figures and staff positions, these two headlines are of interest and arguably work to demonstrate some of the tensions around gender that can be ascertained from RED's gendered make up.

Moving on from thinking about the industrial landscape in which RED operates, I'd like to now move back to the start of RED's story and think about the geographic, temporal and cultural landscapes in which the company was formed and produced its first works, in order to attempt to trace changes in REDs cultural, creative and gendered practices.

### **REDs Beginnings: Setting the Scene**

As a creative 'scene', Manchester was an innovative place in the late 1990s, affiliated with and riding high on successful music indie and rave scenes, exemplified by bands such as The Stone Roses, New Order, Oasis and 808 State, and venues such as The Hacienda. As a city outside of the British capital and indeed in the North of England, Manchester offered something different in terms of its cultural and creative voice, showcasing an ability to produce a dynamic tradition of transformation, often with young creatives at its heart, in which, as Rupa Huq argues 'the underground became the over-ground' (2006: 155). In addition, Manchester was also the home of football team Manchester United, who dominated sporting success in their 1998-99 season, winning the treble – the Premier League, the FA Cup and the UEFA Champions League - situating the city as the 'rock n' goal' capital. Launching RED the same year, Shindler named the company in homage to her team and her regional roots. In calling her company RED, Shindler arguably acknowledged and worked to proliferate the story of Manchester as an exceptional city – and purposefully placed her independent production company in this creative landscape, associating it with the aligned cultural and subcultural capital of Mancunian innovation. Alongside the sub/cultural capital, supporting televisual infrastructure also



existed in Manchester, which was home to Granada Television Studios and BBC North's New Broadcasting House.

As Gillian Doyle and Richard Paterson note, independent television production refers to a sector in which 'program-makers are not cross-owned by broadcasters (or vice versa)' (2008: 18). In this sense, Shindler was free to create original programming – programming that was different, edgy, innovative and unconventional - working with cutting-edge writers who had something different to say and frequently spoke in a different voice. The first show that RED produced was the ground-breaking *Queer As Folk* in 1999. Aired on Channel 4 and written by Russell T Davies, *Queer As Folk* was hugely successful and highly controversial. Based in and on the Manchester gay 'scene', *Queer As Folk* told the story of three young men, Stuart (Aidan Gillen), Vince (Craig Kelly) and Nathan (Charlie Hunnam). Paul Abbott's ensemble drama *Clocking Off* (BBC, 2000-3) followed, again set in Manchester and telling a multitude of stories about workers based at the Mackintosh Textiles factory, stories frequently based around gender, class and racial inequalities. *Bob and Rose* (2001, ITV), the story of a gay man and a straight woman falling in love, authored by Davies came next, then *Linda Green* (BBC 2001-2), a serial comedy drama authored by Abbott, based on the life of 30-year old Linda (Liza Tarbuck), a fun-loving ladette who works in a car-sales showroom by day, and sings in local working men's clubs by night. These four initial 'hits' for RED, helped to establish its reputation as both an innovative storyteller and a company that was also able to achieve mainstream success by working with writers whose stories and voices were unconventional and offered new perspectives on contemporary identities.

This grounding work also, in hindsight, tells another story regarding RED's success in working with high-profile male writers, embedding the origins of RED's own story in a narrative of collaboration between Shindler and these male auteurs. As Linda Seger argues 'woman want to work with the collaborative male [...] and some of these partnerships work because of the understanding and insight each has for the other' (2003: 80-3). Indeed, what can perhaps be seen most clearly from

these initial collaborations, is Shindler's ability to identify and harness in writers and their stories alternative understandings of identity, particularly in relation to gender, sexuality and social class. Like the narratives of the characters in these hits however, Shindler also recognised that identities are changed and shaped through experience and time. As the 20<sup>th</sup> Century became the 21<sup>st</sup>, RED's identity and key collaborators shifted, reflecting new industrial and cultural climates and stories.

*Sparkhouse* (BBC One, 2002), written by Sally Wainwright and produced by RED, aired in three parts in 2002 as a modern-day reworking of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. Interestingly, the character Carol Bolton (Sarah Smart), occupied the role of Heathcliff in the drama, and as such the drama was able to provide audiences with both a narrative stability (via the established known-ness of the story) alongside an unexpected and compelling gender shift via Heathcliff's transformation from unruly male to unruly female figure. Speaking of and in a new, more regional, classed and gendered voice, Wainwright discussed the focus on social class in *Sparkhouse* in interview with James Rampton for the *Independent*: 'People are still very snobby and class-conscious. One of the driving forces of the drama is that Carol and Andrew aren't allowed to see each other because he's middle-class and she's dead rough' (Wainwright, 2002). This new take on an established story proved successful for Wainwright and for RED, attracting 4.81 million viewers.

*Unforgiven* (ITV, 2009) was Wainwright's next collaboration with RED. Starring Suranne Jones, the three-episode story followed Ruth Slater (Jones), after her release from prison, having served 15 years for the murder of two police officers and in search for her adopted sister. Despite achieving average viewing figures of 7.13 million over its three-week run and winning the accolade of Best Drama Series from the Royal Television Society, ITV declined to commission a second series.

Wainwright and RED however went on to collaborate on three more successful dramas, namely *Last Tango in Halifax* (BBC One, 2012-16), *Scott & Bailey* (ITV, 2011-16) and *Happy Valley* (BBC One, 2014-). All three of these serial dramas have won various prestigious industry and audience awards, with *Last Tango* winning a BAFTA and Wainwright herself winning best Drama Writer at the 2013 British

Academy Television Craft Awards for her writing. In 2014, Sarah Lancashire also won a BAFTA for Best Supporting Actress, playing Caroline Dawson. *Scott & Bailey* also achieved success with two BAFTA award nominations in 2012 and 2013 respectively, plus nominations in the Broadcasting Press Guild Awards, the National Television Awards, The Royal Television Society Awards and The Writer's Guild of Great Britain. Interestingly the series was conceived by Suranne Jones, who, on writing an outline with Sally Lindsay, purposefully chose to approach Shindler in relation to its production and development having had a successful working relationship with both her and Wainwright on *Unforgiven*. *Happy Valley*, while still an ongoing drama, won a BAFTA for Best Drama Series in 2015 and went on to win a further three BAFTAs in 2017 for Best Drama Series, Best Writer and Best Leading Actress (Sarah Lancashire).

While Wainwright as a writer and RED collaborator can be understood to have dominated the British television landscape in terms of industry accolades over the last five years, Shindler, while working hard to constantly evolve her collaborations with Wainwright, has also continued to collaborate with a variety of male writers. For example, RED has an ongoing relationship with Russell T Davies, having produced various dramas penned by him including *The Second Coming* (ITV, 2003), *Casanova* (BBC Three, 2005) and the acclaimed and multi-modal *Banana* (E4, 2015), *Tofu* (4Od, 2015) and *Cucumber* (Channel 4, 2015). While Shindler has not worked with Abbott directly (as a writer) since *Clocking Off* because he started his own production company, AbbottVision, Abbott's legacy in RED can be evidenced in both his co-production with RED of *Hit & Miss* (Sky Atlantic, 2012), and in Shindler's collaborations with Abbott's mentee, Danny Brocklehurst, who has gone on to work with RED on a number of projects including *Exile* (conceived by Abbott and Brocklehurst and co-produced by AbbottVision) (BBC One, 2011), *The Driver* (BBC One, 2014), *Ordinary Lies* (BBC One, 2015-16), *Come Home* (BBC One, 2018) and *Safe* (C8, Netflix, 2018). In addition to these continuations of existing and established collaborations, RED has also produced other high-profile dramas conceived and authored by British comedians Sue Perkins and Lenny Henry, namely *Heading Out* (BBC Two, 2013) and *Danny and the Human Zoo* (BBC One, 2015), both focused on identity formation in relation to

sexuality and race, respectively. For clarity then, I am not suggesting that in the present day Shindler as the head of RED works exclusively with women writers, but that a shift can be seen in REDs authorial collaborations, having moved from an exclusively male set of writers at the company's beginning, to a more diverse set of writer collaborators in the present day. Speaking of the present and the gender shift from male to female writers, Shindler notes:

There are more women writers around than there was at the beginning and I really enjoy working with women writers and I'm actively trying to do that, just like we're actively trying to work with writers of colour – so it's important to hear more diverse voices on screen – and I think it's our responsibility to do that. It wouldn't stop me working with Russell or with Paul if the situation was right, or anyone else that I used to work with, so I'm not choosing women above men, but we are actively looking for good women and good diverse writers. (Shindler, 2018)

This clear consciousness in relation to RED actively working to provide opportunities for collaborations with women writers in the present (narrated alongside a softer, yet clear articulation of male writers still being welcome), is revealing, further indicating Shindler's 'quiet feminism'.

### **An Arresting Collaboration: Sally Wainwright and Nicola Shindler**

As the writer and creator of TV shows such as *At Home with the Braithwaites* (ITV, 2000-2003), *Unforgiven*, *Scott & Bailey*, *Last Tango in Halifax* and *Happy Valley* to name but a few, Wainwright has her own highly respected creative record. Unlike Shindler however, her public story in relation to gender impacting on her professional opportunities and success is much more direct. Reflecting on her 2013 BAFTA win, she noted in interview with Vicky Frost for the *Guardian* (2014) that the accolade had brought up 'a lot of emotions [...] One of them was 'Why haven't I won this before now? [...] I wrote the Braithwaites 14 years ago.' In 2017, Wainwright also discussed her forthcoming

*South Bank Show* profile, noting in an interview with Eleanor Griffiths for *Radio Times* that she wasn't overjoyed, but rather:

I thought why haven't they done this sooner? *The South Bank Show* did Paul Abbott and Russell T Davies years ago, but I've been overlooked because I'm a woman. When I started out, it didn't occur to me that I would ever be discriminated against. But later in life I experienced the difference between how men and women are perceived. Men are trusted more, it's just assumed they'll be good at something. Whereas women have to prove they're going to be good at it. (Wainwright, 2014)

Shindler, in particular, is a professional woman with whom Wainwright has actively chosen to work. Their collaboration has, and continues to be a success story, one that has given birth to a variety of extraordinary dramas. Having worked with Wainwright on *Scott & Bailey* and having been aware of what Shindler calls 'Wainwright's frustration with [television] directors' (2018), Shindler actively encouraged Wainwright to direct the second series of *Happy Valley*. In an interview with the BBC, Wainwright was asked 'how she approached the challenge of creating, writing and directing?'

With great excitement. I work hard and it's what I've always wanted to do - to direct and write. It's only now at the age of 50 plus that I've found the courage and managed to surround myself with the right people to make that happen. I am hugely indebted to Nicola Shindler for her courage and her genius and faith in me. (Wainwright, 2016)

What Wainwright speaks of here is a support network – for her *as* a woman, and headed up *by* a woman, Nicola Shindler. This act of professional women pushing other professional women on, is a collaboration that is, in this instance, absolutely feminised. It is however important to note that Shindler and Wainwright are very different women. Shindler is middle-class, more reserved and 'careful' in her approach to public speaking, and is a mother to three children - whom she often mentions in interview, noting the challenges of juggling her personal and professional life. In contrast, Wainwright is of working-class origin, and is less reserved than Shindler in both what she

says and how she talks about the TV industry. She is a mother of two boys, but rarely mentions them in interview. When she does, it is often to make a point about gendered labour. For example, she recalled her time working as a writer on *Coronation Street* in interview with Griffiths (2017), noting that:

After I gave birth to my eldest boy, George, my mum, who was a massive *Coronation Street* fan, came to see me in the hospital. She was looking at the baby and said, 'Isn't that the greatest thing you'll ever do?' I said, 'No, Mum. Being asked to write *Coronation Street* was the greatest thing I'll ever do.'

Evidently, here, the personal is political. While Wainwright is a vocal feminist, Shindler, on the other hand, speaks of feminism in the industry in a differing tone, despite having been listed as one of the 25 most powerful women in television in the world last year and winning the Argonon Contribution to the Television Award at the Women in Film & Television Awards in 2017. In an interview for the Royal Television Society, Andrew Billen (2016) noted the following interaction with Shindler:

I remark that, in an industry in which only 10% of lead writers are women, Shindler discovered a writing star [Wainwright] who was not only a woman, but nearly 40.

"It is not like that," she responds, almost crossly. "I really don't look at someone's age. She had a brilliant idea."

But doesn't she feel that, in a tough, male industry, she must champion women writers and give them a voice?

"No, because I wouldn't ever push someone who I didn't think was really brilliant. So you're not 'giving someone a voice'. You're very lucky to get their work and be able to produce their work. I wouldn't work with someone just because they were a woman."

We look out of her glass office. My God, are there any men working here? She points to one and gestures to the office next door of her MD, Andrew Critchley.

“We have a man executive producer as well. That makes 3 out of 24. The rest are women. It just happened that way and now that’s how it is.” (Billen interviewing Nicola Shindler, 2016)

What is evidenced here in Shindler’s response is a clear insistence that her female collaborators in RED are there on the basis of merit. Interestingly however, the interaction between Billen and Shindler also uncovers something else – a clear resistance by Shindler to what Michael Gerson might call ‘the soft bigotry of lowered expectations’.<sup>3</sup> In side-stepping Billen’s condescension, and (somewhat paradoxically) insisting that quality of material rather than gender is the issue, Shindler displays her ‘quietly feminist’ position. In addition, this exchange also speaks volumes about what is noted in academic studies of television and in screenwriting studies to be the difference between what someone says on television (or indeed about television), and what they actually feel. The work of Will Dunne is perhaps useful here to reflect on this. Dunne argues in *The Dramatic Writers’ Companion* that: ‘It is the action that matters most. No matter how beautifully the dialogue is written, the story is not what they say, but rather what they do. If there is a discrepancy between words and actions, the actions speak loudest’ (2009: 178).

Ultimately then, what I am suggesting here is not that the exchange makes visible a hypocrisy on Shindler’s part, but rather, that what this interaction reveals is in fact the *problem* of Billen’s misunderstanding of the complexities of access and opportunity in relation to women’s professional advancement in the television industry. In labelling Shindler ‘cross’ and in nominating her as ‘secretive’ in his interview, Billen arguably exposes his own ambiguous views on women, and indeed provides some insight regarding the barriers that women personnel in the television industry face in relation to expectations, opportunities and equality.

### From Context to Text: Dramatising the Maternal

In his book *Complex TV* (2015: 233) Jason Mittell argues that: ‘melodrama is more of a mode than a genre, an approach to emotion, storytelling and morality.’ In light of this, I want to suggest that *Scott & Bailey* and *Happy Valley* can be understood as texts that make the melodramatic visible (albeit to different degrees), via a focus on professionally arresting women. More than this though, I want to begin to think through some of the ways in which the approaches to emotion, storytelling and morality made manifest in these two TV texts, work to draw out and problematise the relationships between professionalism, motherhood and feminism.

*Scott & Bailey*, a police procedural drama focusing on Janet Scott (Lesley Sharp) and Rachel Bailey (Suranne Jones) first aired on ITV in 2011. Though its titular nomination, genre and its spotlighting of two female detective constables has meant that it has been compared to the US show *Cagney and Lacey* (CBS, 1982-88), *Scott & Bailey* was both distinctly contemporary and distinctly British. In the series both detectives work in the Manchester Major Incident Team under the accomplished leadership of DCI Gill Murray (Amelia Bullmore). Janet, like her boss, is a veritable professional – prepared, calm, articulate, precise, intelligent, passionate about her job and able to draw on a wealth of experience. She is also in her late forties, married (rather unhappily to Ade, a geography teacher), and a mother of two teenage girls. Rachel Bailey is also an arresting woman – more of an instinctive detective than Janet perhaps, and able to think beyond what is presented to her and piece together clues, incidents and events, working with her colleagues to solve difficult crimes. While professionally competent however, she is often, outside of work, represented as emotionally stunted, self-destructive and impetuous, characteristics seemingly connected to both her Northernness and her difficult relationship with her alcoholic mother.

*Happy Valley* (2014) also focuses on an extraordinary woman, Catherine Cawood (Sarah Lancashire), an experienced, straight-talking sergeant who is bold, markedly adept at her job, physically fit, determined and thrives on chasing down and detaining criminals. Catherine’s life – her role - outside



of work is, however, much more complex. In the opening episode when trying to persuade teenage drug-addict, Liam, not to set fire to himself in the local playground, she tries to connect with him by telling him: “I’m Catherine, by the way! I’m divorced, I live with mi’ sister – who’s a recovering heroin addict. I ‘ave two grown-up children. One dead and one who doesn’t speak to me. And a grandson! So.” While these personal facts are announced with a bluntness that works to deny emotion, outside of her uniform, Catherine is seen to be emotionally pained by these troublesome and tragic relations (or lack thereof), frequently breaking down.

Crucially, both texts can be seen to draw on a sense of emotional duality whereby in the professional arena these women are in control, measured and competent. Outside of their professional lives however, they are flawed, emotionally troubled and often make poor choices. Though this sense of an emotional duality is, on the face of it, rather neat, the close-ups of the characters that are achieved through the slow pace of the storytelling – time taken over detective and procedural work - demonstrates instances of spillage and border crossing. Bailey, for example illegally uses the police data-base to find out details about her former lover who she (rightly) suspects has been lying to her. Scott is revealed to have had a one-night stand with her superior, D.S. Andy Roper (Nicholas Gleaves), a man who has been in love with her for twenty years and with whom she had a brief relationship at training college. *Happy Valley*’s Catherine Cawood illegally breaks and enters a house in pursuit of the man who she believed had raped her daughter and caused her suicide. These moments of professional/personal slippage occur again and again, complicating the storytelling and ensuring a dramatic and salient troubling of morality and a move away from patronising didacticism.

Interestingly, the maternal or the women’s complex connections to motherhood, impending, present or past, is one if not *the* primary conduit for emotional connections between the characters and the audience. In series one of *Scott & Bailey* for example, Rachel discovers that she is pregnant, decides to have a termination, but finds she is unable go through with it. At six months, however, she miscarries. Her impending motherhood, though not brought to fruition, allows for a new and

intimate emotional involvement between Rachel and Janet and Rachel and the viewer (or at least it did in my case), in that while I expected Rachel's reaction to be one of emotion, her lack of emotion made my emotional investment in her as a character more pronounced, forcing me to work harder to try to piece together, or understand her seeming *lack of feeling*.

This led to further detective work, aided by the reintroduction of the maternal in the figure of Rachel's mother, Sharon (Tracie Bennett), who we learn had abandoned Rachel as a child and left her older sister to bring her up. Though Sharon comes back on the scene in season 2, she is not represented as changed - though she says that she is - but increasingly behaves in a child-like manner, or more specifically, like a wayward teen, drinking, doing drugs, having sex with inappropriate men, demanding her own way, becoming reliant upon Rachel financially and being emotionally manipulative. While Rachel is, in the first instance 'taken in' by her mother, her role as a carer for the wayward Sharon – whom she has to bail out literally and financially – and her eventual pulling back from her, demonstrates Rachel's emotional growth.

In *Happy Valley* the complexities and contradictions of the maternal are mined in a more overtly melodramatic manner. While a kidnap initially takes up Catherine's time in the first three episodes, the latter three episodes of the series explore and reveal the depths and indeed the dark corners of Catherine's maternal grief. Bringing up her grandson after the suicide of her daughter (and in choosing to do so losing her relationship with her husband and son), the first half of the series encourages the audience to construct Catherine (and her collaborative relationship with her sister, Clare, (Siobhan Finnerhan)) as a heroic woman; bold, brave, wilful and yet, the second half of the series offers up a psychological exploration of her grief as her interior suffering is made manifest in increasing 'emotional explosions' and is displaced onto her body which is repeatedly battered and bruised. The initial subtleties of empathy give way, however, in the latter half of the series, to larger shifts, the most dramatic of which comes when Catherine's son explodes in anger and emotion

himself, reminding a grief-stricken Catherine of her own cruelty - that after the death of her daughter, Becky, she told him that she wished that he was dead instead.

It is here, through this nuanced storytelling, that we as an audience are compelled to reassess our emotional relationship with Catherine, psychologically revisiting earlier moments in the series and interpreting them differently – in many cases, as acts and emotions of shame rather than of maternal grief. Yet, like the (idealised) maternal, our intimacy with Catherine's character doesn't cause our empathy to shift wholly away from her, but extends in capacity to also *feel* sympathy for her son.

The role of rape in the series is also important in terms of shaping our emotional engagements with women. Two rapes are known to happen in the diegesis, that of Catherine's daughter, Becky 8 years previously - which we believe led to her suicide - and that of kidnap victim, Ann Gallagher (Charlie Murphy), in the present day. Both rapes were committed by the same man, Tommy Lee Royce (James Norton). Unsurprisingly, noting her desire to avenge the death of her daughter, Catherine is determined to catch Royce before he murders Ann. While she achieves this goal toward the end of series one, Ann's response to her rape differs vastly from Becky's. Rather than being consumed and defeated by pain and shame, Ann works to uphold the innocence of her dying mother whom she insists mustn't find out. When Catherine asks her how she's coping, her reply is telling: "I'm coping. What happened says more about him than it'll ever say about me. And I'm not pregnant and I don't have AIDS so..." At this point Catherine interjects: "It's a good attitude. So often women blame themselves, God knows why but they do... in almost every circumstance. You're very rare." In series two of *Happy Valley*, Ann, seemingly inspired by Catherine's professional strength, joins the police, transforming yet further, into an arresting woman herself.

This focus on and privileging of the stories, histories and feelings of women, both textually and contextually, provides a platform on which critique of women's representations, roles and rights on and in television can be addressed and assessed. In considering the texts *Scott & Bailey* and *Happy*

*Valley*, it is crucial to recognise the fact that within these worlds, while the main female figures are seen as extraordinary in professional terms, their maternal competence is not seen as innate, but as a struggle and a site of constant emotional detection. These remarkable women are not homogeneous but collaborate across and harness their professional and personal differences to achieve the best outcomes. Like Shindler and Wainwright's narratives, both texts offer depth in showcasing a multitude of women's experiences, including their personal and professional challenges.

## Conclusion

To compare the textual with the contextual, whereas Shindler's approach to professional storytelling could be considered as reserved, as more Scott than Bailey, Wainwright's approach to storytelling privileges the value of emotion, inviting the audience not only to see, but to *feel* the pain of women and be moved by it. Here then, RED and Wainwright's melodramas can be conceived of as a collaborative feminist model, a type of contemporary political and cultural critique. As Vicky Frost noted in her article about and interview of Wainwright for the *Guardian* in 2014: 'Wainwright is a feminist – at university she was a post-feminist, she says, then she joined the television industry.' This summary of Wainwright's experience articulates her desire to write explicitly feminist texts, to write about the importance of feminism as present rather than post. Shindler's narration of her own experience is, however, less individual in the sense that it clearly and carefully takes into account a much larger industrial and gendered story, in which value and future success is arguably ascribed to RED through what is *not* said about the feminist practices of the company.

In interview, discussing her conversations with Wainwright regarding the possibility of killing off character Tommy Lee Royce in *Happy Valley*, Shindler noted her reticence to end the narrative in this way, noting: 'It's about working. You never say a thing if it's not needed to be said. Only say something when you're helping' (2018). Indeed, such a principle or rule is one that Shindler herself

can be understood to adhere to in relation to professional practices – and one that is key to the continued success of RED and its stories. As the head of RED, Shindler can be understood here as exceptional not only in terms of professional direction, but in the facilitation and creation of a space in which other excellent women can excel and say the things that they want and perhaps need to say and have heard. While Shindler's own wrestling of gender imbalance in the industry is, on the surface at least, much less violent and explicit than Wainwright's, it is no less powerful. Indeed, it is not only what is at stake in relation to what is explicitly said about feminism that is important here, but also the outcome and on the ground results. For Shindler, the outcome to her refusal to nominate RED as a feminist company has arguably resulted in RED, while still working with a variety of high profile male writers, producing the best contemporary television work in Britain at this time - work written and produced by women. As Kristyn Gorton notes: 'feminist narratives continue to articulate the ways in which women come to understanding themselves and their place in the world' (2009: 133).

In these narratives, it is essential that we listen for and to the gaps, for what is *not* said, in order to better understand and value women's professional and personal experiences. This work is also essential to try and close the gap between academic understandings of television, and that of those in the industry itself. While academic critical distance can provide a rich and vital alternative perspective, it also constitutes a potential problem, one that can occur in a failure to understand the negotiation of the personal and the professional in the stories of industry workers. Academics are, like television writers, producers, directors and performers, after all, professional storytellers too.

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<sup>1</sup> The Communication Act (2003) required a new, UK regulator, Ofcom, to oversee the introduction and implementation of suitable 'Codes of Practice' governing transactions between broadcasters and independent Producers.

<sup>2</sup> The two male senior members of staff at RED are Andrew Critchley (Managing Director) and Richard Fee (Head of Development).

<sup>3</sup> Michael Gerson worked as a speech writer for US President, George W. Bush prior to and during his time in office. Gerson is credited with coining the term the 'soft bigotry of lowered expectations':

<https://www.nytimes.com/2001/04/03/us/a-wordsmith-who-shapes-bush-s-prose.html> Last accessed 28 August 2018.