**‘University politics’: change and continuity in representations of higher education between ITV’s series *Inspector Morse* and Colin Dexter’s *Morse* novels**

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This chapter focuses on the phenomenon of *Inspector Morse*. I use the term ‘phenomenon’ throughout to cluster together two media: the *Morse* books by Colin Dexter and the *Inspector Morse* television series, inspired by Dexter, advised on by Dexter, but written and directed by numerous people. The stories of ‘Inspector Morse, an ageing, cultured but cantankerous loner, solv[ing] mysteries with the help of his assistant, …Lewis’ are told across both media over a quarter of a century (Wickham, n.p.). In this way, the phenomenon can be described as an example of ‘transmedia’, the notion that Henry Jenkins elucidated in *Convergence Culture* of ‘a [storytelling] process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed…across multiple delivery channels’ and ‘each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story’ (2007, see also Bird 1998, 12). The transmedial nature of the phenomenon is evident not just in its reception by readers and audiences but also in the history of its making. Dexter wrote thirteen *Morse* novels, and some short stories, between 1975 and 1999. Free-to-air British broadcaster ITV screened thirty-three episodes of *Inspector Morse* between 1987 and 2000: Central Television was ITV’s contractor for the English Midlands and they initiated work on the programme, then made for them by their subsidiary Zenith Productions (Sanderson 1995, 26). Each book and each episode involve a new murder: they are stand-alone plots, but with recurrent characters involved in the investigation, particularly the police and forensic pathologists based in Oxford, where most of the action is set. This is echoed in the premise for the television series: ‘*Inspector Morse* was never envisaged as anything but a collection of films’ (Sanderson 1995, 26, see also 53, 82).

The novels were not filmed in the order they were published, particularly at the start of the series, when some of the novels waited twelve or thirteen years to be televised. Later on, the novels were filmed almost as soon as they were published. All of the novels were adapted for television, although some were renamed and heavily reworked: when I use the word ‘televisation’ in this chapter, it is specifically these programmes I want to invoke. For example, *The Secret of Annexe 3* became *The Secret of Bay 5B*, with a new setting and plot. Sometimes changes to the novels in the television series were taken up by Dexter in his subsequent writing of *Morse* novels – Lewis becomes a Geordie, fresh-faced policeman with a wife and children, for instance, leaving behind his original incarnation as an older, ex-boxer Welshman (Sanderson 1995, 20). Television not only affected the content Dexter wrote, but his style: ‘the television technique of brief, quick-fire scenes has had a beneficial influence, since my own chapters have grown steadily shorter’ (Dexter’s foreword in Bird 1998, 6). As noted above, there are far more titles in the television series than novels: thirty-three compared with thirteen. The first two and last five years of the television series rely almost exclusively on the novels, with the second and third years of its run increasingly using detailed storylines, ideas, ‘little stories and sketches’, especially commissioned for television from Dexter (Sanderson 1995, 21, 69; Bird 1998, 10).

Dexter found the required writing of ‘fifty or sixty or seventy pages in five months’ overwhelming (Sanderson 1995, 21). Subsequently, he was sent the scripts, which he read and made a ‘few suggestions’ about: ‘I occasionally write a bit of dialogue, otherwise I just keep an eye on Morse. You’ve got to have someone keeping an eye on the characterisation, his vocabulary and attitudes. I’m a kind of consultant’ (Sanderson 1995, 23, see also Bird 1998, 6). Dexter is also entwined into the series through his Hitchcock-style cameo appearances, which saw him spending a day on set for each episode (Sanderson 1995, 21). The producers at the outset, Kenny McBain and Ted Childs (the latter, executive producer and Central Television’s Controller of Drama) hired ‘the best writers [they] could’ to work on the show from the outset and, in its busiest years, there was a tradition of bringing in a new writer each year to prevent the programme from staling (Sanderson 1995, 25, 115). Storylines were commissioned by the writers about six months ahead of filming, with one more storyline than the series needed being commissioned to allow a ‘margin for error’ (Sanderson 1995, 81). The series’ writers also flag up the way in which any given episode could have additional writers, making it a highly collaborative script – even before it was interpreted during filming by the director and editor (Sanderson 1995, 71, also cf. Bradbury in Elsaesser et al 1994, 103).

A particularly impressive example of the convoluted textual history of many of the television instalments and their related novels is *The Wolvercote Tongue* (1987). Dexter wrote the plot outline for the television episode, before it was written for screen by Julian Mitchell. Then, four years later, Dexter published a novel, *The Jewel That Was Ours* (1991)*,* which has marked differences to the plot of the television programme but is, according to the prefatory material to the novel, ‘based in part on an original storyline written by Colin Dexter for Central Television’s *Inspector Morse’*. Elsewhere, however, an anecdote more loosely describes the writing as a ‘Dexter/Mitchell double act’ (Sanderson 1995, 74).

I detail this example here because it usefully highlights the rather enmeshed and messy relationship between the television series and the novels, reminding us that the Morse phenomenon should not be treated as the straightforward adaptation of a set of established texts from page to screen, but as something often more collaborative. The multi-faceted entwinement of novels and episodes thwarts any attempt to read the books in a simplistic way as the progenitor of the television series. Indeed, the official website for the television programme – rather tautologically – emphasises its primacy in making the phenomenon a household name: ‘Inspector Morse had existed…in the books of Colin Dexter but it was the ITV version that was to catapult the character into TV’s stratosphere’ (ITV, 2009). The show was sold to television stations internationally, screening to an audience of 750 million people in over forty countries (Sanderson 1995, 9).

This chapter aims to make two contributions to the focus of this volume on the relationship between television series and literature. The first is to demonstrate that the creation of books and television series can develop in an intensely enmeshed way, so as to challenge linear notions such as hypo- and hyper-text, source text and adaptation, print and broadcast, author and adapter (Jenkins 2006, 2007, Cardwell 2002). The second aim builds on decades of work in adaptation studies to challenge a deficit or inferiority model of television ‘adaptation’ of books (Cardwell 2002). Although I discuss *Inspector Morse* in relation to notions of ‘quality’ generally, this chapter seeks to refute one accusation specifically: that television dumbs down and depoliticises the books that inspire some of its programming. The chapter concludes that, on the contrary, *Inspector Morse* embraces a greater role than the novels in articulating and critiquing higher education policy in 1980s and 1990s Britain.

**‘We’re not politicians’: challenging the claim that television robs books of their politics**

 The reactionary claim that television adaptations are necessarily less intellectually sophisticated and politically engaged than the novels on which they are based has been previously problematised in relation to other programming involving adaptation and/or appropriation (Hutcheon 2013, 94, Sanders 2006, 97-98, Cardwell 2002, 21, 71), but not in relation to commonly-maligned genre works, nor in relation to a transmedia phenomenon. In spite of the denial in the quotation taken from the television version of *Death Is Now My Neighbour* for the above subheading,the television series *Inspector* *Morse* shifts the attention away from the eponymous literary character’s personal politics. Instead, it has a range of characters comment repeatedly on national policy concerning higher education in Britain, almost entirely under the Conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major (a brief reminder: the novels were published 1975-1999, the series ran from 1987-2000, and that Conservative reign spanned 1979-1997). However, before talking politics, I first offer a brief explanation of my methodology in choosing and analysing *Morse/Inspector Morse*.

When I saw the call for chapters towards a book on the relationship between television series and literature, I knew I wanted to contribute a chapter on *Morse/Inspector Morse*. It is a phenomenon that relishes its literariness: its creator, novelist and short story writer, Dexter, its television writers, and the lead character all love literature (classical literature is particularly well represented, as both Dexter and Morse’s degree subject), and both enjoy playing with verbal and visual allusions to literature. The use of epigraphs in the novels, for example, is described by Dexter as ‘a harmless bit of self-indulgence’ (Sanderson 1995, 15). Some of its screenwriters even describe the process of writing, including that of scripts for the television series, by using a discourse of literary composition: the title sequence that previews each episode was referred to as the *proagon*, after a similar tradition in Greek drama; one of the writers describes it as like writing ‘some kind of very formal poem…like writing a sonnet…similar to writing rhyme schemes…like writing for the theatre as well’ (Sanderson 1995, 32, 68). Furthermore, those involved in making the television series also constantly invoke the quality of the series in a way that feels aspirationally literary: they repeatedly stake a claim to the series as an example of high culture, viewed by a middle-class (read: ‘cultured’, ‘cerebral’) audience (Childs; Lewis actor, Kevin Whateley; writer Mitchell, producer David Lascelles cited in Sanderson 1995, 26-27, 35, 57, 64, 67, 85). A billboard advertising The Oxford Playhouse declared, for instance: ‘Inspector Morse is no longer Oxford’s only decent drama’ (Sanderson 1995, 118). This perceived literariness was foregrounded in spite of the phenomenon being an example of the detective genre, which, as genre fiction and indeed television as a whole, is often set outside the bounds of literature or even television drama ‘proper’.

Indeed, it could be argued that the television programme outstrips the novels’ literariness, if formal innovation is taken as the qualifying feature (which it is by critics such as Carter, 1990). The novels were popularly and critically well-received, selling an estimated 200,000 copies by 1998 and receiving five awards from the Crime Writers’ Association. However, it was the television series that gained critical acclamation for its formal innovation. The British Film Institute page on the TV series explains that, even though the series adopts the familiar patterns of the English 'whodunnit' … formally, Inspector Morse set a new mould for TV drama’, especially with respect to its two hour running time and ‘languid’ pace (Wickham n.p.). Indeed, ITV were initially concerned that the series was too high-brow and artsy to attract the large audiences they had in mind (Sanderson 1995, 26). However, their fears that literature and television would prove oil and water for their audience were quickly allayed, as Morse became ‘appointment TV’, viewing figures were in the tens of millions, and episodes gained places as ‘highest performing drama on UK television’ and in the top five ‘most watched individual programme of the year’ (ITV 2009, Sanderson 1995, 113, 121). The positive way in which Dexter, *Inspector Morse*’s makers, and critics write about the television series in relation to the novels offers an exception to the rule posited by Cardwell that television adaptations tend to be ‘valued not for their potential to develop or improve upon the original’ (2002, 13), arguably because the *Morse* phenomenon transcends adaptation.

Although thephenomenon gelled with this volume’s declared mission of examining the relationship between television series and literature, I knew I did not want to reprise analysing literary allusions in the series. Besides me, other academics have published on literature in one or (much more occasionally) both of the *Morse* media. Others yet have analysed it as genre literature or television: detective or campus novels or drama (Baker 1994, 1995; Piper 2015; Carter 1990). Being a researcher in an Education department, looking at its representations of higher education felt like a good fit disciplinarily. I had already used an old article by Thomas Brooke Benjamin, an Oxford mathematician, on representations of higher education in popular culture, which mentions *Morse*, for teaching the campus novel for several years (1993). So, I (re)read all the novels, read the short stories for the first time, and (re)watched the whole television series. My coding involved annotating the books and programme transcripts for instances of higher education. Usually this annotation was a one-word note in the margins: ‘undergraduate’, ‘college’, ‘assessment’, ‘conference’ and so on. Then, I re-read the excerpts I had coded from both media, thinking about similarities and differences between representations of higher education they contained: for example, between different characters, between the start and end of the books series, between the start and end of the television series, and between the two media.

What most caught my attention was the way in which the television series, to a greater extent than the books, seemed to draw attention to, even to critique, higher education policy in a fictional context (a fictionalised Oxford University and its colleges) that had strong, synchronous parallels in the actual UK sector. The television series uniquely obsesses over ‘university politics’ (*Twilight of the Gods*): I use this phrase a little perversely to refer not just to internal, institutional politics, but to describe national politics impacting on higher education, in Britain, during the span of the series (cf. Showalter 1993, 145). My work builds on that of Helen Piper who argues that the ‘voice’ of the television detective works to articulate ‘profound dissatisfaction with the world around us’, ‘extending the question “what went wrong?” beyond the text [i.e. the dead body] and inviting audiences to reflect more generally on the social [and political] world around them’ (2015, 3, 1-2). The final three episodes of *Inspector Morse* were seen by about one third of the British population (ITV 2009): I include these figures here because the reach of the programmes is crucial for my argument that the television show becomes a space for airing debate about national, government, higher education policies of the time. Not only did viewers not turnoff because of this content: perhaps they turned on in order to watch these political debates play out?

**‘These dreadful cuts’: Thatcher’s fiscal and education policy, neoliberalism in the university sector and associated changes to higher education**

Changes in higher education are articulated in both the novels and the television series. The novels tend to invoke them as part of a ‘history lesson’ for the reader stretching back to Oxford’s medieval origins. In contrast, the television series focuses on changes contemporary with the setting of the action and treats them in a way that is more pointedly political. The novels uniquely offer some detailed explication by Dexter of nineteenth-century reforms to the university spanning reforms to the range of academic subjects offered; standards; the diversity of the student and staff body, in terms of gender, faith, nationality and class (*The Silent World of Nicholas Quinn,* 24; *Secret,* 18; *Last Bus to Woodstock,* 99; *The Riddle of the Third Mile*, 47; *The Dead of Jericho*, 71*; Jewel; Death*). Dexter’s novels also include views on change in the academy from the perspective of teachers, perhaps informed by his own previous career as a secondary school Classics teacher. In the 1976 novel *Last Seen Wearing*, a modern language teacher, Roger Acum, is shown mid-INSET (in-service education and training) conference, listening to an academic expounding on the joys of teaching Racine, and beginning ‘to wonder if the premier universities were not growing further and further out of touch with his own particular brand of comprehensive school’ (159-60). His musings are not part of the equivalent television episode, perhaps because of the difficulty of rendering interior monologues on television but clearly also because it represents a diversion from the plot and, in terms of the overall series, from university into secondary education. Only a little of Dexter’s evolving novelistic history of the university is sewn into the television series. For instance, heated debate about equal opportunities for university job applicants with disabilities and women features in the televisation of *The Silent World of Nicholas Quinn*.

 However, by far the most-invoked education ‘reforms’ impacting on the university in the television series are the contemporary funding cuts to higher education and the fostering of neoliberalism in the university under successive Thatcherite governments. It is possible to argue about the ‘real’ nature, size, effect of these cuts and other aspects of higher education policy at the time. However, for the purpose of this chapter, their actuality is almost irrelevant: what matters is the prevalence of negative perceptions of them and their deleterious effects. Factors such as the television series spanning a slightly shorter and later period than the novels; the scripting of some of the novels over a decade after they were written by Dexter; and the need to avoid sudden changes in the atmosphere of the series, especially as it approached its end, perhaps explain why the politics of higher education seem to linger on Tory government policy even after its demise in 1997 (Roth 1995, 10, 17; cf Showalter, 15). An explicit focus on funding in higher education often occurs in episodes not based on a specific Dexter novel or represents the introduction of this focus into the script-writing where a novel is being adapted. In *Ghost*, a senior academic bemoans ‘these dreadful cuts’ when probed by Morse about the suitability of a diplomat appointed to the role of master of the college: ‘a college needs friends in high places’, he adds, presumably to protect, intermediate or negotiate benefits for particular institutions.

 There are rare moments when the insider perspective of the direness of Oxford’s situation is questioned, for example, when Morse points out that ‘the University is always moaning about how it hasn't enough money. And yet there's always enough for a college dinner for 200 guests’ (*Twilight*). In another episode, audiences are invited, through a college member’s conversation with Morse, to understand such extravagant events as the institution speculating to accumulate, inviting prospective donors to dinner (*Happy Families*). Oxford’s relative poverty, compared to American institutions, is discussed in *The Daughters of Cain*, with the former described as looking increasingly ‘like an ancient, down-at-heel uncle. Someone in an old and none-too-clean cardigan, whom you ask to Christmas dinner simply for old times' sake’. All of this demonstrates that paucity of funding is seen to be an issue in higher education throughout the television series. In the next few paragraphs, I demonstrate the solutions that the series shows, and usually problematises. They include moving to American universities, moonlighting, collaborating with industry, speculating financially and courting donations from corporations and individuals.

The better academic pay that American institutions can supposedly afford is invoked in *Cherubim and Seraphim* and *Fat Chance*, along with the generous, alternative income streams afforded to scientists that can maintain them at Oxford, in spite of its low pay (see also *The Infernal Serpent* for more ‘science pays’ rhetoric). Some of these, such as consultancy, are legal; some, such as manufacturing and selling party drugs on the side of a research project, blatantly illegal. Carter demonstrates that science itself has been characterised as ‘barbarous’ in university fiction (1990, throughout chapter 6), but the lengths that scientists are supposedly prepared to go to in navigating the funding cuts is a fresh seam mined by the television series. In the threat posed to the wider community through the deaths of young people who take the drugs this researcher has concocted, it is perhaps possible to read a ‘lesson’ to policy-makers on the dangers of underpaying academics. It is not that such moonlighting is not present in the novels – giving lectures to tourists is mentioned as bringing in an additional £100in *Jewel* (276). Rather it is the greater scale and calamity of the human consequences, in the television series, that freshly characterises lack of funding in higher education as a slippery slope that damages society. In the television series, scarcity of funding makes senior members of the colleges and university susceptible to fraudsters who appeal to their hunger, often greed, for money (*Ghost*, *Masonic Mysteries*). *Lewis*, the spin-off series based on characters established in *Morse/Inspector Morse*, continued to pursue episodes concerned with an uneasy relationship between education and industry in the sciences, exploring research ethics in sleep-science studies (*Reputation*) and experimentation on animals in neurosurgery (*Entry Wounds*).

 The television series is saturated with examples of canny investments, even financial speculation, many of which involve academics turning a blind eye to their unethical nature and the conflicts of interest they entail. *The Infernal Serpent* involves a college Master, formerly its successful investment bursar, popular with the college, but who has invested in an agro-chemical company. The company’s products have been subsequently linked to child cancer in the areas in which they have been used by academic and journalistic investigations. The interrogating academic – a well-known and much published environmentalist – dies from a heart-attack after being assaulted in what looks to be an attack intended to silence him. Presciently fearing he would be killed, and unable to get any of the three newspapers he approached to carry his story, he tape-recorded his allegations for the detectives to find in the event of his death. Morse has to tussle with Chief Superintendent Strange to pursue the case, with the implication that his superior is hobbled by his social relations with influential members of the university. In response to his superior’s resistance, Morse presses the conflict of interest, constraint on academic freedom wrought by the situation, and (in light of the murder) criminal suspiciousness of ‘a CORBI representative [being] among the college’s advisors’. To this, Strange briskly offers the rejoinder: ‘Nothing unusual in that these days. Business subsidises universities’. In another episode, a college’s prospective investment with ‘rapacious bastards’ in an electronics export business is described by the college’s alumni and financial consultant on the matter as: ‘oil and water. Economic argument compelling. Politically, there were risks. On the whole, I thought, prospects were good for them’ (*Happy*). The television series is rife with examples of investment by Oxford colleges which serve to highlight for audiences the ‘tensions between the modern university and the world of business’ (noted by Showalter in relation to academic fiction 2005, 9, 78) and which it suggests are the product of contemporary UK higher education policy.

Similarly, the television series includes numerous instances of donation from corporations and individuals to the colleges, some of which are at the heart of plot structures and murderous motivations. It depicts academics desperate, often fatally so, to secure such gifts to alleviate the supposed dearth of funding caused by higher education funding cuts. There are specific allusions to Thatcherite policy in terms of funding that will get around her moratorium on the creation of academic posts. These include ‘Allied Steel Engineering’ donating enough money for two college fellowships (*Death*); the donation of ‘two million to finance a new chair’ (*Who Killed Harry Field?*); plus a donation from the ‘demigod of third world education’, who ‘made his fortunes selling educational hardware to Asia’, which ‘will allow the college to unfreeze 10 of 16 frozen chairs’ (*Twilight*). That the donor is receiving an honorary doctorate in law from the university implicitly as a ‘thank you’ is a nod towards the corrupting of academic standards, as well as perhaps ironically inviting audiences to recall the scandal eight years earlier around the decision of Oxford University Congregation (its governing assembly) *not* to award Thatcher an honorary doctorate of civil law in 1985, making her the only Oxford-educated Prime Minister that century not to receive one (Carter, 1990). Indeed, also receiving an honorary doctorate in the episode is a Welsh opera star from a working-class, coal-mining background – it is barely implicit here that this is a community broken by the demise of British mining and Thatcher’s attempt to break the trade unions. The award is explained to Morse as an act of defiance from the singer’s childhood neighbour, the Vice-Chancellor, in the face of establishment politics and discrimination against the Welsh in England, during a prolonged period of strained Anglo-Welsh relations under Thatcher. It also represents an attempt by the Vice-Chancellor to balance the politically right-leaning award to the donor with a left-leaning ‘antidote’ to the neoliberal climate.

Elsewhere, the wily ways of money-hungry colleges are not ameliorated by characters in the episodes and are left by the series as apparent warnings about the consequences of neoliberalism for the sector. Examples include the decision to rusticate rather than send-down an offending undergraduate because it is hoped his wealthy father will make a donation to the college (*Daughters)*. In the same episode, a college fundraising campaign is callously rebranded a memorial appeal in ‘honour’ of a murdered don, knowing his popularity with alumni. This don was described in life by financially-minded colleagues thus: ‘his worth to the college wasn’t just his scholarship, it was keeping all this standing. And students and dons in it’ *(Daughters*). Speeches by the University Chancellor become cynical fundraising ploys. We witness his notes being tweaked to draw forth donations from Oxford’s namesakes internationally and he jokes with colleagues about the way in which any one with enough money can buy posterity at Oxford, getting their name into ‘the Bidding Prayer: ‘lt's something we say at the beginning of each academic year. Naming our benefactors. Thanking God…Your name does get recited, and the Warden and FeIIows have to Iisten’ (*Twilight*). The spectre of donors getting a say on everything from architectural designs, which are perceived to threaten Oxford’s existing aesthetics, to the content of degree programmes is raised in the same episode (though resistance to these changes is also problematised in the episode as rooted in xenophobia and racism).

Where is Morse positioned in all of this? The novels clearly establish him to be a life-long Labour voter. He articulates several critiques of neoliberalism in the university throughout the series – especially where the academic characters are complacent about, or even criminally driven by, it. In *Twilight,* he rails against the attack on the humanities under the Tory government of the period (see Carter 1990, 251), positioning as his enemy, and the enemy of the law, anyone who ‘hates arts and ideas’ (this is his attempt to profile the killer in this particular episode). The episode concludes with Morse sighing: ‘Art and life, Lewis. Art and life… AIways preferred art, myseIf. Don't know about life’, suggesting not just his characterisation in the television series as a lonely, unworldly bachelor (unlike his strip-club visiting incarnation in the novels) but the value he places on the escapist functions of art, a related sector despised by Thatcher.

Yet Morse is not above occasionally voicing a critique of higher education from a seemingly neoliberal standpoint – or at the very least, demonstrating what Brooke Benjamin claims was widespread negative bias in public attitudes to higher education and misconceptions of research (1993, 47). For example, Morse derides the futility of academic research in both the novel of *The Way Through the Woods*, rather mocking a doctoral dissertation on the bodyweight of the great tit (223). In the television version of *Silent*, he extends the target of his railing from niche research topics to include teaching and assessment, echoing a populist critique of academia as lacking real-world application: ‘These dons! There’s enough brains here to save the British economy. What do they do? Obscure research and teaching loutish undergraduates. A lot of important research goes on, cancer and that. Yes, of course. But it’s pretty rarefied, setting exams’. Some possible explanations for Morse’s slippery stance suggested in the series include that his character’s attitude is influenced by bitterness at his own failure to carve an academic career, and therefore jealousy (Dexter’s foreword in Bird 1998, 7); but also the fact that the multiple script-writers of the series inflected the character slightly differently – even within an episode, since in the televised *Silent,* Morse rebukes academia for being too worldly and not wordly enough, all in the space of two hours. Ultimately, however, Morse is a voice against the monetisation of higher education on the basis of its potential to corrupt academics and institutions and to lower standards, decrying the ‘service industry’ set-up of the English language testing syndicate in *Silent* and rebuking the college leadership that ‘economic considerations seem to play an inordinate part in this college’s thinking, sir’ (*Daughters*)*.* Both of these exchanges are introduced to existing Dexter titles by the television script-writers.

Before concluding the chapter, I want to consider two further phenomena highlighted by the television ‘adaptations’ which *Inspector Morse* does not explicitly link to funding cuts in the series, but which are often connected to funding issues in public debates on higher education policy: outreach activities by academics and the marginalisation of students. One of these is a proliferation of academics undertaking outreach activities in the television series, compared to the novels. By ‘outreach’, I mean activities intended to reach a public audience beyond members of the university. Both the novels and the television series include mention of academics working on traditional outputs – monograph publications loom particularly large. However,the television series also shows academics engaged in making documentaries (*Greeks Bearing Gifts*); being lured to London by the prospect of a television appearance – Morse and Lewis discuss ‘What would flatter a university man in his sixties?...Appearing on television in something intellectually respectable’ (*The Last Enemy*); and newspaper reporters profiling current and prospective Masters, heads of college (*Infernal, Death*). While the emphasis on these activities fits the general pattern of the more intensive investment of the television series in the politics of educational funding, it is important to keep in mind that it might also be practically motivated: showing an academic writing a book is better suited to novels, with their reliance on words, than television, with its emphasis on movement and dialogue (Sanderson 1995, 21).

A final difference between the television series and the novels is the former’s relegation of student experience: we do not see or hear from many of them as central characters; certainly, we do not see or hear from them engaged in mundane university life other than fleetingly, by way of dressing the shots of the colleges and city streets. When we do occasionally hear from or about them, it is in the direst of circumstances: an undergraduate reprimanding an academic for his research glorifying war, as she sees it, in an ironic vote of thanks (*Greeks*); an undergraduate experiencing an attempted rape by her tutor (*Enemy*); an undergraduate falling to their death while on a drug-induced trip (*Daughters*); and a female PhD student being exploited by her supervisor academically and sexually (*Bus*). What we do not get here, that we do in the novels – apart from much attention to everyday student experiences – is much of a glimpse into their minds. In the novels, we read Morse’s reflections on his own undergraduate days; reflections by other characters on their student days (Anne in *Jericho*); or the working-class history undergraduate enraptured by the intellectual and romantic thrill of supervision: ‘Being with Cornford, talking with him for an hour every week– that had become the highlight of her time at Oxford’ (*Death*, 100).

Once more, there are practical reasons for this in the television series, such as the need to concentrate the focus on a small number of core characters throughout, rather than being able to momentarily flit to a peripheral character (Sanderson 1995, 20). However, the reduced student perspective in the television series further contributes to the series’ critique of UK higher education’s neoliberalist trajectory. The series enacts the marginalisation of students within the university sometimes posited as a consequence of the monetisation of academia: the academics seem to be far too busy thinking about smart college investments or entertaining prospective donors to devote much time or thought to them.

The television series concluded in the year 2000. As such, it does not capture any effects of the tuition fees introduced under New Labour in 1998 that might be expected to make students, as clients of the university, a greater focus of the dons. Interestingly, the sequel programme, *Lewis –* whichcomfortably spanned the raising of tuition fees in England in 2004 and 2010 – features students as main characters, including in student theatre productions and student magazines, and also represents undergraduate lectures. Whether a comment on the centrality of student experience in a fee-paying regime or part of a drive to recruit younger audience members to the programme, it effectively throws attention onto students within the university to a greater extent than many instalments of *Inspector Morse*.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have identified the Morse novels and television series as a transmedia phenomenon: one in which each media makes a distinctive and valuable contribution, but in which the media developed alongside each other in an intensely enmeshed way. Although I have suggested some practical reasons for differences between the *Inspector Morse* television series and the *Morse* novels, I have also argued that the television series offers a more sustained, explicit engagement with the British social and political climate of the late 1980s and the 1990s, specifically higher education policy under successive Tory governments, than the novels. That it does so with such consistency is all the more remarkable given the variety of writers involved, but also because of the need for the series to sell well internationally (Sanderson 1995, 26-27, 53, 82). Perhaps this domestic political content was felt not to get in the way of the gripping detective plot. Perhaps it was seen as part of the quintessential Britishness that made the series so successful overseas (Olive 2013). Perhaps debate about the neoliberal university was held to be sufficiently globally prevalent to be of interest beyond the UK.

Another possibility is that those involved in the series’ production were piqued enough to let their creation of a fictional space for debating the neoliberal university triumph no matter what. Alan Pater describes ‘a quality of British [television] writers’ thus: ‘we love to preach about the state of the nation…What a writer offers is a passionate and personal view of the world. In the best British television, these personal views were able to flourish, and profound questions were asked of the audience’ (Elsaesser et al 1994, 125). Many of *Inspector Morse*’s writers, and directors, had themselves known and benefitted from greater state funding of higher education and the arts than subsequent generations. For example, Minghella was a university teacher before giving up that job to write full-time; similarly, Malcolm Bradbury, best known for his novel *The History Man*, which – adapted for television ‘under Thatcherismus’ became a critique of the excesses of 1960s liberationism and radicalism in higher education(Sanderson 1995, 28, Elsaesser et al 1994, 100). Another writer, Mitchell, ‘received a first-class degree in history while attending Wadham college and later spent a year doing research at St Antony’s College’ (Sanderson 1995, 67). Daniel “Danny” Boyle and John Madden have worked as theatre and film directors, sectors also smarting from cuts to state funding during the period *Inspector Morse* was made.

Or, perhaps, ITV felt that critiques of the prevailing political regime would sit well with its audience, themselves feeling the pinch of recessions during the series’ span. The television series’ frequent engagement with the politics of higher education refutes patronising, paternalistic ideas about the nature and audiences of television evident in writing, at the time, on universities in popular culture by the likes of Oxford academic Brooke Benjamin (1993). Indeed, Childs and McBain are on the public record as having resisted initial pressure to dumb down the show because they were passionate about not patronising audiences (Sanderson 1995, 26). The consistency with which *Inspector Morse* embraces a greater role than the novels in articulating and critiquing higher education policy in 1980s and 1990s Britain makes the phenomenon a useful example with which to challenge pervasive over-generalizations about the depoliticising nature of literary adaptation for television.

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